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OLD FROSTY, THE GUIDE; or, Niokana, the White Queen of the Blackfeet.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "NICK O' THE NIGHT," "HIDDEN LODGE," "NIGHTINGALE NAT," "DANDY JACK," "KIT HAREFOOT," ETC.



RED WASP STAGGERED BACK, CUT TO THE BONE, ALMOST, BY THE SHARP LASH.

Old Frosty, the Guide;

OR,

NIOKANA,

The White Queen of the Blackfeet.

A Tale of the Far Northwest.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "NICK O' THE NIGHT," "HIDDEN LODGE," "NIGHTINGALE NAT," "DANDY JACK," "KIT HAREFOOT," "MIDNIGHT JACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

OLD FROSTY'S BET.

"FIFTY dollars to ten that I kin do it!"

The score of bronzed men seated around one of the first camp-fires built by white men in the Blackfoot country, looked up at the speaker in doubt whether to laugh or regard him as a mad-man.

"I'm in dead 'arnest!" continued the swarthy man. "Fifty dollars to ten, that I kin go into the village an' git tarmes, an' good ones, too—from Arrow Head himself."

"Not so fast, Frosty! Thar isn't a white face beyond the hills behind us; not one, unless—"

"Unless what, Donald?" asked several voices, as the speaker paused.

"Why, unless Dwarf Dan an' his boys hev kept their word."

"Kept it? Pshaw!"

Boisterous and contemptuous laughter followed the last sentence, and the giant target of the merriment turned upon the laughers with a scowl on his dark face.

"You'll laugh on the other side o' yer jaws afore we're out o' the Blackfoot kentry!" he said, snappishly. "Thar ain't a man in the gang what knows Dwarf Dan as I do. We've got to keep our eyes open; the man what says that he hev see'd the last o' Dan, doesn't know what he's talkin' about."

"That's so, Donald! I've hed some acquaintance with the chap myself. He's meaner than the hull Blackfoot nation; he never fought a man open-handed—never! Them what laugh don't know 'im. I know suthin' about the hoss-stealin' last night, that isn't in everybody's noggin."

"What, Frosty?" chorused a dozen voices, and the speakers gathered around the lank individual whose sharp Yankee features would have rendered him a marked person anywhere. "If you know who got the horses last night, spit it out!"

"Did I say that I know who got 'em?" queried the queer-looking man. "I only said that I know suthin' about the job what everybody don't know. I say it ag'in. But let's go back to my original proposition. I'll bet fifty dollars to ten, that I kin git tarmes out o' Arrow Head. Thar's gold in these hills—plenty o' it! All we want is a permit from Arrow Head to stay hyar. He's sent us word to git out, an' already we've buried five o' the best men as ever carried a pick. We're on Injun ground. Uncle Sam hev given it to Arrow Head, his heirs and assigns, furever. Dwarf Dan knows that these hills ar' full o' yaller rocks. Thar's enough gold hyar to buy all the diggin's in California we want—we must have it! I'm goin' to git the permit, fur without it we kin do nothin'. Fifty dollars to ten, that Frosty Paddock gits it. Who takes the bet?"

"Frosty, we can't afford to lose you at this stage of the game," said a big-shouldered fellow with a kind face. "You're the only one among us who knows this country. By George! before we sacrifice you for a chance at these hills, we'll back out and leave 'em."

"That's what we'll do, Frosty!" chimed in several voices which told that the rough Yankee was a favorite among the venturesome gold-hunters. "We can't dig here without Arrow Head's consent, and he's already given us five days to leave in. Black Tom is right; we'll leave the kentry right off before we'll let you go off to try to change that red devil's mind."

For a moment the tall Yankee was silent. The earnest words of his companions had touched his heart, and his big eyes seemed to swim in tears.

"Boys!" he cried, after several futile efforts to speak. "Frosty Paddock ar' one o' them kind what kin appreciate sech words, but it ar' no use talkin'. If it war daylight I'd like fur ye to see the hills around ye. They're full ov gold—chock full. Now what's the use in goin'

back when Arrow Head kin be brought around jest ez easy as I kin turn a flap-jack? I'm goin' to do it. No! I'll not hear a word, Black Tom. Do ye see that foot?" and the speaker thrust his right foot forward into the ruddy light of the camp-fire.

At any other time some rough, laughable remarks would have passed concerning the size and shape of that foot; but now none greeted its owner; all gazed silently at the member incased in a dirty moccasin tied with a leathern string over the instep.

"That foot kin do more with Arrow Head than all the talk in the world!" continued Paddock. "You've heard of masonry an' sech like, boys; but I know suthin' thet none o' you ever heard of. With thet old moccasin I kin walk all over Blackfoot land, an' dig in ever hill above ground."

Paddock, the guide, was becoming an object of more than common interest. He stood in the center of an open-mouthed crowd whose members were staring at the ungainly foot that he kept in the foreground.

"A good deal of that may be mere talk!" ventured a voice on the outside of the crowd.

"Mere talk? Who said thet?" cried the guide, turning quickly. "Ah! it war you, Mr. Ramsden. Mebbe it be you who don't know what he's talkin' about. Whar's yer ten dollars thet say thet I can't do it?"

"In my saddle-bags," answered the person called Ramsden, who was a young man of three and twenty.

"Git it an' put up!" roared Paddock. "You're one o' the very chaps thet I thought would talk opperation."

The last sentence was muttered in a tone of self-satisfaction; it did not reach Ramsden's ears, for the young man had stepped to a pair of leathern saddle-bags into whose capacious depths he had thrust his womanish hands.

"By the eternal stars! he can't bluff me!" he said to the man who came up to argue him from the bet. "I don't want his money—I'll donate it toward getting him a tombstone—but I won't be bluffed—especially by a dirty Yankee like him."

As he uttered the last word, Ariel Ramsden—the youngest man in the camp—drew a small bag of gold dust from out of the pockets of the saddle-bags and sprung toward Paddock.

"Here I am!" he cried. "I was never beat at the game of bluff; and my last ten dollars say that you can't get a permit from Arrow Head for us to dig in this country. Now my down-east friend, I've got the straddle on you. put up or shut up."

Ariel Ramsden was so excited that he did not see the lowering looks of the men who surrounded him. His eyes were full of the triumph of a sinister purpose.

Frosty Paddock, the trusty old guide of the North-west, quickly ran his bronzed hand beneath the bosom of his gray shirt and produced a bag similar to the one the youth held.

"Thar's about fifty-two in mine!" he said.

"Will ye take my word?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Then take the dust, Tom. If I git Arrow Head's permit, it's all mine; if I don't, hand it over to the boy."

Black Tom, the chosen captain of the adventurers, did not come forward without some urging.

"I'd rather not!" he said. "By George! Frosty, if looks as if I had a hand in drivin' you off."

"Nobody's drivin' me off! I wanted to go. We want the gold in these hills, an' thar's the old shoe what kin unlock the mountains fur us."

The wager was put into Black Tom's hands, Ramsden not objecting to the stake-holder. As he turned away, his face wore a leer of devilish triumph, seldom seen in one so young. He fairly clenched his hands as he moved off, nor did he pause, until he had left the camp several rods behind him.

"I was itching to get you started, Abel Paddock!" he hissed. "You might as well walk pinioned into the Missouri, as into Arrow Head's camp. Things are working admirably; five have got their quietus; there are seventeen left. With you out of the road, Frosty, it'll be an easy job; but for fear that moccasin business might help you, I'll guard against it. Samson's power lay in his hair; yours, you say, Frosty, in your moccasin."

"We'll steal that!"

If a shell had fallen from the star-spangled vault of night and exploded at Ariel Ramsden's feet, he would not have started back with more alacrity than he did from the unexpected voice.

He laid his hand on the pistol in his belt.

"No shootin', pard," said the same tone, and the next moment Ramsden stepped forward to greet a pigmy.

Scarcely five feet in hight, with a head set plump upon a pair of Atlantean shoulders, and with a pair of eyes that glared like a tiger's, a human being confronted the young gold-hunter.

"Not a word!" said the dwarf. "I've heard every word to-night—his hint about the horses an' all. You may count on those fifty dollars, fur he's lost 'em already. It's all right over the hills fur our party! Pard, you hev'n't see'd the half yet. I b'lieve thar's resolid gold hills in this kentry. They war cussin' me back thar?"

"At any rate, you have been the recipient of no complimentary remarks in Camp Frosty to-night."

"I should jedge I hed not from what I heard!" was the response. "We'll let 'im go an' try Arrow Head. I'll not be fur off when I'm wanted. Keep cool; don't give 'em any chance to bounce you. We hedn't any trouble last night; the roan was a leetle restiverter we got her out; but she soon come to it handsomely. Arrow Head thought her a beauty."

"Arrow Head?" echoed Ariel Ramsden, gazing at the dwarf.

"Yes; we must have strange bedfellars in Blackfoot-land," said the dwarf, showing his teeth in a grin. "But—"

"Listen!"

The men turned their heads to the north-west.

"Good-by, boys! I'm not goin' off to stay! Frosty Paddock will come back; he'll be on hand when you want 'im, if not in the flesh, then, by Jehosaphat! in the speerit!"

The speaker could not be far away.

Almost before the last word had ceased to echo, the moon, long obscured, showed her golden disk over the edge of a cloud, and the two conspirators saw the lank figure of the Yankee between them and the satellite.

The next moment it disappeared.

"How did that strike you?" asked Ariel Ramsden of his dwarfish companion. "Do you believe in the supernatural?"

The dwarf looked into the youth's face. His misshapen form was shivering as if ague-stricken; his teeth chattered; his face was white.

"What? Put it in plain English, boy. I didn't quite grasp it," he said.

Ramsden smiled.

"He said he would come back in the spirit, if not in the flesh," he said. "Do you believe in ghosts, Dan?"

"I do, so help me Moses!" cried the dwarf.

"Then you won't touch him?"

"Not for the world. But I'll see that he's teched, Ariel; and I'll see the techin' done, mebbe!"

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE QUEEN OF THE BLACKFEET.

JUST beyond the hills that bordered the gold-hunters' camp on the north, and scarcely fifteen miles away, stood the chief village of the then all-powerful Blackfoot nation. It covered the greater portion of one of the loveliest plains in the far North-west, and presented an imposing sight. The Blackfeet could arm six thousand warriors and send them forth to battle; the nation led by Arrow Head, the most unscrupulous and merciless red giant that ever trod the war-path, had never suffered defeat at the hands of an enemy. It was aggressive, unconquered, always conquering!

On the western side of the village of the Blackfeet grew a copse of tall young trees which, standing at singularly equal distances from one another, might have made an observer believe that they had been planted by the hand of man. Here the Indians lounged on the yielding grass through the heated terms, and watched the rude games that the young bucks kept up with much spirit.

Let the reader accompany us to this spot.

The camp-fire that we have just left had been kindled with the going down of the sun. The natural grove was thronged with Indians; everywhere was observable the tall, sinewy figures of the Blackfeet. On one spot a group of chiefs were conversing in serious tones, while on another, at the edge of the grove, a scene of merriment was being enacted.

A number of Blackfoot boys ranging from thirteen to seventeen were trying to break a young horse. The persistent efforts of the youths had attracted a crowd of older braves, who every now and then applauded the would-be Rareys by a boisterous clapping of hands.

A stout lariat had been passed around the colt's neck; this in turn had been made fast to a tree, and two boys were clinging to the animal's mane trying with all their might to hold him while one of their number, twice thrown, was attempting to remount.

The colt, a powerful young animal, was not the least exhausted by his long battle, and moving around, despite the efforts of the red boys, was preventing the persistent one from mounting. All at once, however, the watchful eye of the youthful red-skin saw a chance, and he sprang like a panther astride of the horse. But his victory was of short duration, for the colt darted forward a few feet, and then planting his fore-hoofs suddenly in the ground came to a halt which sent his rider far over his head, a handful of mane attesting his futile hold.

This horse victory was received with loud yells from the spectators, and Red Wasp, the unlucky boy, picked himself up in no good humor, and not willing by any means to try it again.

But at this juncture, and while the intractable colt was in the full flush of his success, there came upon the scene a person whose appearance was received with keen delight.

"Ha! ha! Niokana, our white queen, will ride Kishewata the strong!" cried the Blackfoot boys, and with one accord they began to clap their hands.

The person thus greeted, strange to say, was white!

She was a girl who could not have passed her seventeenth year. She was rather dark-skinned, but very beautiful, with her deep blue eyes and graceful figure. Clad in a rather fantastic garb profusely adorned with beads, she presented an appearance which would have commanded great attention anywhere.

She reached the spot where Red Wasp had alighted just as that individual was recovering his equilibrium, and said, in the Blackfoot tongue:

"Kishewata threw Red Wasp? He can ride the earth with no danger of being thrown."

The eyes of the discomfited young Indian flashed madly at these words.

"Then let Niokana ride him if she dare!" he cried.

"Kishewata belongs to Red Wasp; he shall be Niokana's if she rides him!"

"Then Red Wasp will have to give him up," was the response.

The Indian boy shut his teeth hard but said nothing.

The girl hurried forward and fastened her eyes on the horse, now unsecured save by the lariat already mentioned. Red Wasp followed slowly, a latent triumph over the white queen visible in the depths of his mad eyes.

"Keep off! keep off!" cried a score of voices to the girl, who was advancing upon the horse with her powerful eyes fixed upon him. But she paid no attention to the warnings.

When she reached the horse and began to stroke his beautiful mane the astonishment of the spectators knew no bounds, and Red Wasp bit his lips.

"Now I will ride Kishewata!" she said, placing one neatly moccasined foot upon the lariat stretched taut between the sleek neck and the tree.

The next moment she vaulted upon the colt's back, producing a toughened piece of buffalo-hide which she slipped over the head and into the mouth as she did so. Then before those at the tree could loosen the lariat, the girl leaned forward, and with a knife, that glittered for a moment in the last sunbeams, cut it and was off!

A wild shout of exultation greeted this action, and those who looked saw the white girl seated on the back of the colt, guiding him, as it appeared, according to her whim!

The duskiness of the hour enabled horse and rider to disappear in a minute, and Red Wasp who had claimed the colt was overwhelmed by the derision of his comrades. For awhile the red boy received the keen tongue-thrusts with outward good grace; but soon he lost his temper, and almost before the hoofs of the mastered colt had ceased to sound, he was in the midst of a group of his deriders punishing them with blows that brought blood from many a Blackfoot nose. A few took sides with Red Wasp, and at last the fighting became serious; knives flashed from buffalo belts; tomahawks were brandished aloft; and one Blackfoot boy went down with a cleft cheek before the older Indians interfered.

All at once with a cry that resembled the growl of the tiger, as much as the human voice, a giant came bounding over the green sward, and without hesitation threw himself among the combatants.

"Shame! shame!" he cried, in the tribal tongue. "When we learn to fight among ourselves, we will not stand long before our enemies!"

He at once began to put an end to the *melee*, which he did in a summary if not a cruel manner.

For awhile he sent the boys whirling right and left with his brawny arms, and then, seizing two, one with each hand, he brought their heads together in a series of blows that seriously endangered their craniums. Dropping the two first seized, he pounced upon a brace of others, and proceeded to serve them in like manner. All the time from his lips rose the words: "Shame! shame!"

The young red-skins, not relishing the indignation and punishment which their disgraceful brawl had brought upon them, began to disperse; but not until at least eight of their number had been well "bumped."

"Go to your lodges and learn to carry water and dress skins!" thundered the giant, after them. "The Blackfeet ought to hide their faces and weep. When the old warriors have gone to the hunting-grounds of the Manitou, the Snakes will come and bind the once powerful Blackfoot tribes, for the young warriors fight among themselves like wolves. Go and hide your faces!"

The chief—for chief he was—was in a tempest of passion, and with the last word he turned upon the older warriors with a scowl disapproving of their non-interference, and strode haughtily away.

The belligerent boys, shamefaced, crestfallen, but indignant went to the lodges.

There was a tempest of madness in each heart, and the name of Niokana fell in no gentle tones from more than one pair of lips.

"She shall ride Kishewata again!" cried Red Wasp, springing from the cot of buffalo-skins upon which he had thrown himself and buried his face. "By the lodge of the Manitou! she shall ride him, and ride him forever! The young pale-face who looked so long at her at the beginning of last sleep shall see her ride Kishewata the strong. Red Wasp will never make her his squaw, nor will he give her to the white skin who will try to win her."

At that moment the young Indian caught sight of a beautiful object hanging against the side of the wigwam. With tigerish cry he sprang forward and tore it from its place, to hold in his hand a delicate and miniature shield fashioned from human hair. As he held it at arm's length his flashing eyes saw only the girl who had made it from her own luxuriant tresses and given it to him, and a moment later his mad hands had torn it in pieces, and his heel ground the fragments into the earth.

"She will come back on Kishewata with a laugh for me, Wasp!" he hissed. "But she will come back to ride him again, and when the colt stops the Blackfoot nation will have no pale queen!"

It was dark now; the sun had set behind the great village of the Blackfeet, and the grove which we have just left was almost deserted.

Almost, we say.

At the edge of it a lank figure sat on a horse and looked toward the thousand lodges.

"Wal, hyar I am, right side up with keer," he said. "Now, I'll go down and set about the parmit!"

The lines resting idly on the horse's neck were taken up; but the next moment they dropped from the man's hands, which shot quickly toward his belt for a pistol.

A sound, well known to the old guide, had touched his ear.

"Two kin play at thet game?" he hissed. "Ha! thar ye ar—an Injun boy, by hokey!"

In the uncertain light the borderer could distinguish the outlines of the figure which, crouched at the foot of a tree near by, had an Indian bow drawn to its utmost tension.

He saw his peril and raised the pistol; but before his fingers could give the trigger the required pressure, the twang of a bow-string broke the silence, and the feathered shaft struck the white square in the breast.

"Hit fur the first time!" cried the man, reeling in the saddle. "Cuss the young skunk! I'll chaw him up fur this!"

With this he threw himself to the ground and despite the terrible wound, sprang upon the Blackfoot boy before he could fly.

The next instant Frosty Paddock had avenged the shot!

"This don't look like gittin' the parmit!" he gasped, halting for a moment before he staggered toward the horse.

"But I'll get it! Dead or alive, I'll see thet

the boys ar' allowed to hunt the yaller rocks in the Blackfoot kentry! Old Frosty Paddock war never yet outwitted. Cuss the red skunk an' his baby arer!"

The determined man reached his horse and threw himself into the saddle.

But he almost immediately fell forward on the animal's neck, and the beast remained standing under the trees with his silent and motionless rider.

Had death cheated Frosty Paddock out of the "parmit?"

CHAPTER III.

A BOY AND HIS RIVAL.

WHILE the strange tableau just described occupied the spot we have lately left, a party of white men, well mounted, were riding toward the Indian village from the south.

To be precise, the cavalcade consisted of four men, whose bearing in the saddle as they dashed over the undulating ground proclaimed them whites. The foremost was low and squatly in build; his head was set plump upon his shoulders, and his arms, unusually long, seemed to bother him. Those who rode behind this individual were well-formed men; one was a mere boy in years; but he sat his steed with the air and grace of a finished equestrian.

They entered the Blackfoot town to find it still, and the leader of the quartette drew rein, which example was followed by his companions.

"Thunderin' still I think," he said, looking over his shoulders at the dark figures behind him. "Bless me if thar's an Injun dog out. I'd like to know whether Frosty's got hyar yet. What are ye thinkin' of, boy? Come, wake up. Gal on the brain, eh?"

The individual thus addressed by the dwarf was the boy just mentioned, and a flush overspread his soft cheek as he started.

"Me? Oh, I've been wondering at the quies that reigns around us!" he said, his looks, if the dwarf could have seen them, belieing his words.

"That'll do to tell to the gophers," said the dwarf. "Be keerful, Kyd, er you'll hev a rival er two, fur bless me ef she hesn't the prettiest face west o' the Missouri. An' this is the kentry whar they arn't nice erbout puttin' a troublesome fellar out o' the way."

Kyd Douglass, the boy, may have thought that he detected a threatening gleam in the snaky eyes of Dwarf Dan; but his reply did not denote it.

"Who has been saying that I am in love?" he asked. "Not I, surely, Dan. Why, I never saw the girl till yesterday, and I hear that she is betrothed to a young Blackfoot."

"Yer always discoverin' uthin'," said the dwarf. "Goin' to marry a young greaser, eh? Now, thet won't do. But gals take queer notions sometimes, Kyd; as you hev found this out mebbe you kin tell us who the Injun is."

"That, sir, I cannot do. I do not know one Indian from another: they all look alike to me."

The dwarf bit his lip.

"I'd like to know!" he said. "I've got a knife or a bullet for the heart of the skunk whar tries to cheat me."

For a moment the men did not exchange another word. Through his long, dark lashes, Dwarf Dan was shooting arrows of intense hatred at the boy. His lips were compressed beneath the gray mustache, which, hanging almost to his chin, did not enhance his personal appearance. He saw naught but the youth; the tiger was watching the fawn.

"We'll go!" he said, so suddenly, as to startle the trio who heard. "You kin hev the gal, an' welcome, Kyd; only keep yer peepers open while ye'r courtin' her."

The boy raised his eyes, but did not smile; his look told that he was inclined to doubt Dwarf Dan's sincerity.

All at once he felt a hand grasp his right arm, and before he could turn his head to inquire into the meaning of it, he heard a voice at his ear.

"Kyd, don't let Dan soft-soap ye!" were the words that the boy heard. "He's jest told the biggest lie thet ever fell from human lips. If the gal is engaged to an Injun, don't look at her. Let'er go! Kyd Douglass, yer bones will bleach in Blackfoot land ef you try to get her."

The youth listened, spellbound, to these words. He knew the man from whose lips they fell, and his answer was a pressure of the speaker's rough hand. That grasp poured out the thanks of his heart, and as they rode slowly through the Blackfoot village, his chin rested on his breast.

"Hold on thar!" whispered Dwarf Dan, in a tone that halted his followers. "Thar's a horse comin' straight toward us, an' he's shod, too!"

The last words instantly placed all on the alert, and Dan drew his pistol as he leaned forward to catch a glimpse of the solitary horse approaching in a measured walk.

A shod horse at that hour in the Blackfoot village, could tell but one story to the quartette: It belonged to and was undoubtedly ridden by a white man, and he—Frosty Paddock!

Around the listeners, in the dim light of the stars, stood the ashen-colored lodges of the Indians. The scene was ghostly, and the tread of the still unseen horse, did not, in any measure, take away the supernaturalness that invested time and place.

Kyd Douglass did not crane his neck forward for the purpose of seeing the coming man. He kept his eyes fixed on his dwarfish leader, who, pistol in hand, waited with the eagerness of the Sicilian brigand for his prey.

"By the gods!" suddenly exclaimed Dwarf Dan. "The old fellow got the permit; but not the one he came to look fur."

"Mebbe he's shammin'! He's a cute one, Dan."

"Him shammin'?" cried the dwarf, throwing a look of contempt at the speaker. "Does a man sham with an arrier in 'im? Look square at him. The horse hes stopped. He hes been carryin' Frosty all over the Injun town to-night. He said he would come back dead—back to the camp, he meant. Now hyar he comes ag'in. Give way, an' let 'im pass!"

Dwarf Dan's face was pale as death as he drew aside to allow Frosty Paddock passage by.

"Look at 'im keerful, boys, an' of ye see a sign o' life say so, an' we'll finish the job."

The horse bearing his ghastly burden came slowly forward. The old guide had risen from the position in which we left him at the edge of the grove; he now sat tolerably straight in the saddle; his hands hung listlessly at his side, and the feathered barb of the deadly shaft was plainly visible against the bosom of his shirt.

Dwarf Dan's command to "look at 'im keerful" was obeyed by the three as he went by.

Kyd, the youth, leaned forward and fixed his eyes on the guide's countenance, nor took them off until the horse had borne his burden out of sight.

The dwarf captain drew a long breath of relief as he turned to his companions.

"Wal, what did ye make out?" he asked.

"Dead!" said the youth's companions, and the youngster echoed: "Dead!"

"Didn't see a move?" queried Dwarf Dan.

"Nary move!" was the answer. "He's takin the permit down to camp."

The dwarf showed his teeth at this brutal wit; but Douglass cast his eyes down the way that Paddock had gone.

There was a something in the boy's countenance which told more than he had spoken concerning Frosty Paddock's condition; it seemed to give the lie to the word that he had just uttered.

To be plain, Kyd Douglass had detected a lifting of the eyelids as the stricken guide rode by. More: he had thought that in the opening of his keen orbs the Yankee had realized his situation.

"I'll keep this from them," the boy had said, to himself. "They'd finish the Indian's work if they knew. Frosty, you and I have a great work to do in the Blackfoot country!"

"Thet's the first dead man I ever see'd ride a horse!" said the dwarf, breaking in upon the youth's thoughts. "I hope they all don't do it in this kentry. Boys, we've got the winnin' hand. When we've did the other job, these mountains an' their gold ar' ourn. Isn't this wuth riskin' one's skin fur? We don't want any pardners. Four ar' enough: four! no! I furgot Ramsden. Five ar' most too many!" and the speaker sent another quick glance at the boy. "All we hev to do is to act kind o' white with Arrier Head; keep away from the red gals. We didn't come hyar to make love. We come fur gold—gold! Don't furgit that."

"If I let a woman's face drag me from the yaller rocks, I want to be shot!" said one of the men.

The other echoed the same opinion; but Kyd Douglass was silent.

Fortunately his abstraction was not inquired into by Dwarf Dan; but one of the men was not unobservant, for he leaned forward and shot these words into the boy's ear:

"Leave us, Kyd, an' go back. You can't fool the cap'n. He's got the tiger in 'im, an' he's marked you. Go back an' leave the gal; let her choose between Dan an' the Injun!"

Kyd Douglass did not reply; but gave the speaker a look that said:

"Go back? I'll die here first!"

When the quartette resumed its ride, it was to move quietly through the silent town without disturbing a single inhabitant.

"We'll bunk hyar, fur thar's no use in disturbin' the chief till mornin'," said Dwarf Dan, drawing rein in the grove. "Marley, Morgan, I want you to do me a favor. Go down and see ef Arrier Head hesn't left the village. He war talkin' about reconnoiterin' Camp Frosty. Mebbe he's gone."

The men thus addressed looked into each other's faces and then glanced at the boy.

"Ef ye won't go, I'll go myself," said the dwarf leader, tartly, scowling at their hesitation.

"No; we'll go!" was the response, and a moment later the two men glided away.

They went down into the Blackfoot town and heard the heavy breathing of Arrow Head in his own capacious lodge.

"Dan knowed we'd find the old chief hyar," Marley said to his comrade. "I wish we hedn't left the boy. He's in danger when—"

The sharp report of a firearm broke the man's sentence and sent both forward.

"If he's teched the young 'un!" said Marley, clenching his great hands. "I war beginnin' to like 'im. Somehow or other, the boy war gittin' a big hold on my old heart."

The men sprung forward and ran swiftly between the lines of lodges; they reached the line of trees and came suddenly upon a man on horseback.

In his right hand he held the bridles of two other animals.

Marley uttered an oath as he bounded forward, and laid his hand on the man's knee.

"Whar's the boy?" he demanded.

Dwarf Dan looked down upon him with a devilish gleam in his evil eyes.

"The boy?" he echoed, strangely. "I don't know."

Marley clenched his teeth till they cracked.

"Dwarf Dan, you lie!" he cried, and the next moment he had jerked the dwarf from the saddle and was holding him at arm's length, his tawny hand at his meager stretch of throat.

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK TOM AND THE WOLF.

It was man's inordinate lust for gold that had led all but two of the party, headed by "Black" Tom Barlow, into the wild Blackfoot country.

Not many days prior to the opening of our story the party had left St. Louis. A report almost too visionary to obtain credence anywhere, had reached the ears of Barlow and a few reckless companions who, for some months, had been loafing round the city, waiting, Micawber-like, for something to turn up.

There was gold in fabulous quantities in the Blackfoot country; the hills were "red," the beds of the streams wore an orange color; it was the land of Ophir—the real El Dorado. Fired by this report, Tom Barlow began to hunt up a lot of congenial spirits. In St. Louis, at that time, they were not hard to find; and in less than a week after receiving the news, twenty-four daring men had flocked to Barlow's banner. Money was needed to furnish an outfit; it came from the pockets of a youth named Douglass, who appeared strangely among the ranks of the adventurers, and seemed eager to penetrate to the almost unknown land of gold and—death!

We have seen this boy in Blackfoot land.

From the first Tom Barlow was the chosen leader of the expedition which left the city with much secrecy; but as the way lengthened before them, contentions arose in the ranks, and, as the reader already knows, a desertion took place. Before the bank of the upper Missouri had been reached, the continuous quarrels between the leading mischief, Dwarf Dan, and Barlow, had come to blows, and one night the dwarf and four others left their companions—stole silently from the camp, leaving behind a written threat that they were going to join the Blackfeet and assist in their (Barlow's party's) destruction.

Now, the desertion of Dwarf Dan and three of his companions did not surprise the others; but that Kyd Douglass, the youth, by whose generous aid the expedition had been fitted out, should make one of the party, was past comprehension.

"I didn't think that sech a scamp as Dwarf Dan could influence sech a sensible boy!" Tom Barlow would almost invariably say when referring to the subject.

"The devil's in the young 'un," Paddock would exclaim. "Hevn' I noticed 'im ever since we left Saint Louis? He hesn't been still a minute; but jumps about like a frog on a

hot grid'dle. Why, menny a night I've see'd 'im come down to the edge o' the camp an' look to'ard the Blackfoot kentry an' say—'I wish I hed wings! We creep along like snails; we'll never git thar!' Menny a time I've heard 'im talk thus when he thought nobody heard 'im. Under these sarcumstances his goin' away don't 'stonish me. Dwarf Dan may hev gone up thar to git all the gold; but the boy sees suthin' else."

"What could he see up thar but gold, Frosty? Why, thar isn't a white face up yonder!"

"Mebbe not, Tom. But gold never makes a boy act that way. I've see'd too much o' human natur' to come to thet conclusion."

Such conversations would always result in a victory for the Yankee guide, and he would leave Black Tom in a state of doubt and perplexity.

Ariel Ramsden, a man already encountered by the reader, was the second "young man" of the party, and was well built and handsome.

If Frosty Paddock had bestowed upon him the attention that he had given to Kyd Douglass, he would have discovered that there was another youth eager to reach the land of gold.

But the old guide had taken more than a passing interest in Douglass; hence he did not care much for Ramsden.

Ariel Ramsden was brave almost to recklessness. In the little battle with the Indians in which the band had lost several men he had displayed great bravery, and Tom Barlow had dubbed him "a man to be trusted."

But none saw the secret conversations that took place between Dwarf Dan and Ramsden, prior to the former's desertion. A few moments of eavesdropping might have altered Black Tom's opinion of his trusted man.

With this digression, let us go back to the gold-hunters' camp in the valley in Blackfoot land.

We have seen how Frosty Paddock's farewell words affected Ramsden and Dwarf Dan who had met at the edge of the camp, the latter emphatically asserting his belief in the supernatural; the former feeling inclined to laugh, that declaration to shame.

But perhaps the evil glimmering eyes of the dwarf deterred him.

It was almost daybreak when Ariel Ramsden went back to the camp and crept silently to the spot he had lately left. The fire was burning low, and the figures of the gold-hunters in many a grotesque position greeted Ramsden's eyes.

"Food for bullet and tomahawk!" murmured the young man, looking at his sleeping companions. "It is astonishing how far a man will go, to—die. Well, sleep on, boys; you'll need rest before this drama of the Far North-west is played through."

Noiselessly Ramsden sought the blanket which he spread near the fire; but he could not sleep. His restless tossing promised to waken his comrades.

"There'd be growling if I roused them," he said. "I'll go down to the water and watch for morning there."

Again the young man left the camp; but this time not unseen.

The eyes of Black Tom Barlow were upon him, and the burly figure of the captain of the gold-hunters went noiselessly after him.

Ramsden did not lead Tom Barlow far, for near the confines of the camp, he threw the blanket at the foot of a tree, and cast his frame upon it.

"Queer!" muttered Barlow, in a somewhat disappointed tone. "A fellow's up to no good when he gits so restless. After all, mebbe he fought so back on the Katchewan because he hed to."

But Barlow did not go back and leave Ramsden alone.

Some startling thoughts were running through his head. He was calling up the many singular and, until that hour, mysterious remarks about Ramsden, which Paddock had casually dropped from time to time. He remembered now that he had seen Ariel scowl at young Douglass, and tried, in vain, to call up a time when he had seen the two youths in friendly converse.

Tom Barlow had food for deep thought, as he stood there in the hour before dawn, watching the young man who, he thought, was to become the evil spirit of the camp.

All at once the sound of hoofs fell upon his ears.

Ariel Ramsden, not asleep for a moment, leaped to his feet, and Barlow, as he started forward, despite his self-control, cocked the rifle tightly gripped by his tawny hands.

"More boss thieves?" he asked himself. "By George! this time they'll find somebody awake,

an' they'll git a dose o' lead that'll do 'em good."

The hoof-beats ceased, even as Barlow muttered; but soon afterward they were heard again.

"They're comin' up the hard bed of the old river!" Black Tom said. "Now, if they hev designs on the camp, they'll come over the hills an' right down this way."

Ariel Ramsden, standing under the tree, heard the tread of the unseen horse with the same clearness that rewarded Barlow's attention.

But the young man thought that Dwarf Dan was coming back; therefore when with the first streaks of dawn a horse appeared on the crest of the little knoll upon which both men had fixed their eyes, he started forward with the exclamation, "Dan it is!" on his lips.

But it was not Dwarf Dan.

Ariel Ramsden made this discovery, and came to a sudden halt.

Daylight was fast illuminating the scene.

He saw that the horse was without a saddle; but his rider sat him with grace and ease.

"It's an Injun gal!" exclaimed Tom Barlow, gazing in astonishment upon the statue-like figures of the steed and his rider. "Now, what does the boy intend to do? Mebbe he's in a love-scape already; an' I'm to see a meetin'!"

But such thoughts were speedily dissipated, for the captain of the gold-hunters heard an oath fall from Ramsden's lips, and saw him feel for the rifle that leaned against the tree.

"Fate has given her into my power!" he said. "I cannot be mistaken. It is she! Shall I let this opportunity slip, and then have to follow her into the death-mazes of Blackfoot land? No! not when a bullet can settle matters for all time to come. I can go back and say that I fired at an Indian. If they come out and find a white girl they will curse my hastiness; but dare not punish. Yes, I'll put an end to the trouble she has caused us, for fifteen years."

Black Tom did not hear all these words; but he heard enough.

He, too, now saw that the rider of the horse was a white girl, clad in the fantastic garments of the Blackfoot maidens. The animal appeared jaded from hard riding; but the girl kept his head well erect.

Ramsden was as yet unseen by her; but the eyes of Captain Tom were upon him.

"Ha! the camp of the gold-hunters!" suddenly cried the girl, in good English. "They are the men who must leave the country of the Blackfeet or die. The little white man and Arrow Head have put their heads together, and they swear that the hunters shall never go back to tell their people that the hills of the Blackfeet are full of the yellow metal. When the five days are up their camp will be full of dead men. What should Niokana do? She ought to go and tell her white people. No! not now. By and by when she learns how the little white man and Arrow Head are going to fight them, she will come and tell."

"You never shall, my traitress!" hissed Ariel Ramsden, throwing the rifle to his shoulder. "I'll make a round million by this shot, and fill Black Tom's camp with dead men, besides!"

But there were eyes upon him that never lost sight of a single movement, and when the sharp report of a rifle broke the stillness of that Western dawn, Ariel Ramsden staggered back with a shriek.

His right arm hung limp and bloody at his side, and his rifle, so lately lifted against the girl's heart, lay undischarged on the ground.

"No shootin' at angels when Tom Barlow's about!" said the captain of the gold-hunters, stalking toward the wounded man. "Git out o' the camp! You're the meanest dog what ever follered honest men. Look hyar, Ariel Ramsden—thar goes the gal! Wal, let 'er go; she isn't ridin' back alive by yer grace. Who is she?"

The question was shot fairly at Ramsden, as Niokana and her horse suddenly disappeared over the brow of the knoll.

But the youth bit his lips, and, instead of a reply, sent a gleam of tigerish hate at the questioner.

"Who is she?" repeated Barlow.

"Find out, if you can!" was the defiant reply.

"You will not tell?"

"I will not!"

"Do you know?"

"I do!"

Black Tom stood for a moment before Ramsden; his dark, rough face wore an undecided expression.

Suddenly he said:

"Did I break your arm, Ariel?"

There was no pity in his tone, none in his eyes.

"I—I think you did!" was the answer.

"You may thank yer stars thet I didn't put the bullet into yer head. We're goin' ter dissolve partnership. You must leave Camp Frosty—leave it forever, fur if you come back, we'll shoot ye down like a dog. Ye'r young yet, an' thar's stuff in ye to make a good man; but we don't want to bother with it. I guess you've got friends hyarbouts. Now git out."

Ramsden stood still for a moment after Barlow's speech. Then with his handsome face darkened by anger, he advanced and raised his left arm.

"You've got me foul, Black Tom Barlow!" he cried. "I'm at your mercy, and cannot but obey. I will leave Camp Frosty, but I'll come back again. I'll do better than the fellow who has gone after the permit; he will never come back—never! You don't know why I sought the Blackfoot country; but it was for a purpose; if you were good at guessing, you might not shoot wide of the mark from what you have seen and heard to-night. You will not always follow me, doglike, as you have done to-day. The time will come when you will not be near to save the life that has just gone over the hill. And I swear by the good of Paradise and the bad of Pandemonium, that for each drop of blood that has fallen from my right arm to-day fifty shall flow from your heart and the hearts of the men you lead. This is no boy's threat; it is a devil's. Good-by, Tom Barlow. I'll see you later!"

With a look that might have killed, Ariel Ramsden turned his back on the captain of the gold-seekers, and, unmolested, walked away.

Tom Barlow watched him out of sight without a word.

"I stirred the young 'un's bile!" he said, with a smile of utter contempt, unmixed with a single expression of fear. "I almost wish I hadn't let 'im go. He's come cl'ar out hyar to find thet gal. Thar's a mystery about it."

Puzzled, Tom Barlow went back to camp. He found it somewhat excited; the rifle-shot had roused it.

Upon sight of the leader, the men surrounded him.

"It war nothin' much," Black Tom said, carelessly. "I shot a wolf in the fore-leg—that war all."

"But where's Ramsden?—did you see him?" came the query.

"You bet I did. That war the name of the wolf I shot."

The rough men looked into Tom's face, but he did not explain.

"Boys, I know suthin'," he said. "We're not goin' to git the permit. Now, shall we go back an' leave the gold?"

The answer came from every man as if but one had spoken:

"No! we'll die here first!"

CHAPTER V.

A SAMPLE OF BLACKFOOT MERCY.

THIS determination was uttered by the bravest spirits that ever crossed the muddy tide of the Missouri. Standing around their chosen leader, with bronzed faces and clenched hands, they looked the very men who would carry out their words without a sign of shirking.

"Thet's 'bizness!" said Black Tom Barlow. "Over them hills ar' thousands of Injuns; but they sha'n't drive us out o' this gold land ef we don't want to go."

"Never! We came hyar with all the chances ag'in us, an' we're willin' to take 'em as they come, one at a time, er all at once!"

This sentiment was received with keen approbation, and at Barlow's suggestion, the sixteen adventurers held their naked knives above their heads, and swore to accomplish the object of their invasion of the Blackfoot country, or die in the attempt.

After the oath, at Barlow's command, the gold-hunters seized their axes, and soon the forest near by rung for the first time with the sound of the white man's steel.

The adventurers worked with a will and the sun as he went down that day threw his last beams upon a strong log fort which had been built around the only wagon of which the party could boast.

It stood on the level ground just west of the little valley where Camp Frosty had been established. Before it stretched a plain covered with alkali dust and almost destitute of any living thing, while behind, and on either side, were patches of timber. At the unanimous wish of the men the structure was called 'Fort Barlow,' and standing where it did, defiant as Gibraltar, it was certain to become the scene of sanguinary struggles.

While Black Tom and his men worked on the fort, they often wondered about Frosty Paddock's absence.

If the lank guide could get the coveted "permit" from Arrow Head the Blackfoot, then, the old hills would open their golden stores to the men; if he failed—death!

What would that permit be?

According to Blackfoot usage, the chief would ride to the gold-hunters' camp, and extend the moccasin on his right foot to Black Tom.

Paddock had told them this.

But where was Frosty now?

We left him riding slowly like a dead man through the great village of the strongest red tribe of the North-west. He had just passed Dwarf Dan and his followers, and shortly thereafter occurred the thrilling incident with which we closed our third chapter.

Let us return to that interesting spot.

If the reader could have followed the bold guide, he would soon have discovered that he was not riding whence his horse of its own will took him.

As he passed Dwarf Dan he saw that individual, and shut his teeth a trifle harder. But he did not betray himself and passed out of sight.

Now what's to be did?" he queried, in a hoarse voice, suddenly reining in his horse at the confines of the Indian town. "I can't be ov much account till I git this arrier bizness fixed up. Sum strange kind of strength seems to keep me up. The fainty feelin' is all gone now. Queer! by George! mebbe the arrier hes to stay whar it is."

The moon which had sweptly slowly from her bed below the horizon was now shining with bewitching effulgence, and turning to the golden disk Frosty Paddock gently opened the bosom of his hunting-shirt, and, while he grated his teeth, fixed his eyes on the feathered barb that stuck in his breast.

"I don't think it is tipped with bone or iron!" muttered the guide. "The baby Blackfoot arrers are not sure death like the full-grown ones. It hezn't bled much—a bad sign. I'll try to pull it out."

The fingers of old Frosty's right hand now gently yet firmly took the shaft and slowly drew it forth.

As the point, sharp but barbed as the guide had imagined, left his flesh a few drops of blood welled from the wound. The man's face was ghastly in its pallor.

"I don't feel so well!" he said. "I wish I hed left the arrier stay whar it was. This may be a case like Duke Leger's was, down on the Cheyenne. He hed an arrier in 'im jest like I hed. He got erlong first rate while it stayed thar; but when we pulled it out he died. I feel that old spell comin' back. Whar's the camp?"

The man looked about him with rolling eyeballs. His general aspect told that a terrible crisis of some nature was near at hand.

"The camp?" he repeated quickly, but in a reproving tone. "Frosty Paddock, hev ye lost yer manhood? Does a baby arrier scare ye? The man what talks o' goin' back to the camp without the permit is a coward, an' I kin mop the ground with 'im! Aha! the permit! Thet's what I come hyar fur."

He wheeled his horse suddenly and urged it into a gallop back over the ground he had just traversed, until the sharp report of a fire-arm broke the stillness.

The horse stopped without any command, and turned its head to the rider.

"Thet'll rouse the Injuns!" muttered Frosty. "They'll swarm out o' the lodges like bees out o' a hive. Hello! what does that mean? Hev the thieves fell out among themselves?"

The voices that fell upon Paddock's ear caused him to turn in his saddle toward the west.

He heard Marley demand the boy's whereabouts from Dwarf Dan; he heard the answer and the lie that quickly followed.

"Let Dan touch that boy!" grated Paddock.

"I've got more'n a passin' int'rest in 'im, myself. I'm one o' the few who know what brought 'im inter this kentry. Tech 'im if you dare, Dan!"

A moment of attention told Paddock that Marley was grappling with his leader.

The guide could not control himself.

"I can't stay outen a fight, thar's no use tryin'!" he exclaimed. "Besides, ef Dan's teched the young 'un, my hand belongs in the scrimmage."

He started forward, riding down the edge of the woods, but he had not proceeded far when a figure sprung from behind a tree and stopped his steed.

"Thank Heaven! you live!" cried a youthful voice. "I thought I saw life in you a while ago. Don't go down there; let them fight and destroy one another. You see I am not touched; that gun was mine. It went off accidentally. Listen! the whole village is roused."

"Good! I'll get to see Arrow Head," said Paddock.

The boy, Kyd Douglass, gave him a strange look; then he saw how white and haggard the guide was.

"You had an arrow in your breast a while ago. Where is it?"

"Hyar!" and the borderer drew the shaft from his belt and held it up before Kyd's eyes. "The boy what giv it to me hes stopped makin' sech presents; hes gone outen the bizness!"

The smile that played with the corners of Paddock's mouth as he talked, was ghastly. Kyd Douglass fairly shuddered.

"But I'm goin' down thar!" said the guide, suddenly. "Don't I know that voice that sounds like the bellow of a bull? Listen! you can't understand what he's sayin', fur he's talkin' Blackfoot. He's cussin' all the white people, swearin' that not one shall live in his kentry. That means Frosty Paddock an' you, boy, just as much as anybody. I'm goin' down an' see about it."

"No!" and Kyd Douglass held firmly onto the bridle. "Why, man, you'd hardly get there. The arrow has given you your death-wound, Frosty. Come! the camp. I'll take you back. You'll have friends about you there!"

"Say, what ar' ye talkin' about?" roared the guide, as he leaned forward and seized the boy's wrist. "Who is it that says die to Frosty Paddock, before he gits the parmit? Young 'un, ef it warn't fur what I know, I'd knock ye into the middle o' next week. Take yer hand off the rein, boy, an' go back to the camp yerself. Tell 'em I'll be along arter awhile, with the parmit. I'm one o' them what don't die 'til they're ready, an' Old Frosty ain't ready, by a long ways, to go on the spirit trail."

Kyd Douglass started back with a look of horror at the man, who with death written in face and tone, could talk thus.

"That's right, boy: go back! I'll try an' get the gal when I get the parmit. Go back!"

The outstretched hand of the tall guide pointed toward Camp Frosty; but Kyd Douglass did not stir.

And while he stood there, with his eyes still fastened on Paddock, the horse touched by the guide's heels shot away.

"He's not only dying, but mad!" exclaimed the young adventurer.

He started after Paddock with the words on his lips, but soon stopped; already the guide was out of sight.

Meanwhile, on the spot where we have seen Marley jerk Dwarf Dan from the saddle, there were loud voices.

The accidental discharge of Kyd Douglass's gun, had roused the Indian village. Armed in an instant, the Blackfeet poured from their lodges. Led by the giant and merciless Arrow Head, they had rushed to the scene of the struggle in time to wrench Dwarf Dan, already choked to insensibility, from Marley's gripe.

Of course the two deserters were surrounded in an instant, and then it was that the great chief lifted his voice and declared that the whites should be driven from the land that they had invaded.

Marley heard all this without a murmur; but with eyes fixed on the dwarfish figure on the ground.

"I hope I've choked 'im to death!" Marley thought. "He killed the boy—murdered 'im in cold blood!"

These words had hardly passed through the man's brain, before Arrow Head, the Blackfoot, whirled upon him.

"White man kill his chief—Arrow Head's friend!"

"I hope so!"

"White dog glad, eh?"

The flash of Marley's eyes and the glance that he sent to the prostrated dwarf, answered Arrow Head's envenomed words.

With one majestic stride, the Blackfoot fiend halted before the man, who, held by a score of scarlet hands, was as helpless as a captive in irons.

"You got me foul," was all that Marley said, looking undaunted into the glittering eyes of Arrow Head.

The hatchet which the chief had lifted fell bloodless at his side.

"Take the white dog to the tree that stands in the moonlight and tie him there!" he said to the braves who held Marley.

This command was promptly obeyed, and the gold-hunter soon found himself fastened to a tree, with his face turned toward the Blackfeet.

During the tying process, Arrow Head had not been idle, and when the guard had finished their work, six bowmen stepped forward.

"Great Heavens! Arrow Head is going to treat me to the death he always gives a foe!" muttered Marley. "But I'll face it like a man. Look up, John Marley; grit yer teeth an' cuss the scarlet skunks to the last."

As he looked he saw the shining tips of the Blackfoot arrows drawn to the bow.

"Shoot an' be hanged!" he cried. "Morgan, remember this!"

The next instant six bowstrings were released from the red fingers, and John Marley's head dropped upon his breast as four arrows buried themselves in the seat of life.

An oath fell from Morgan's tongue, and a strange cry caused many to wheel and see Dwarf Dan standing erect, but still almost black in the face from the terrible choking.

Arrow Head, with a cry of pleasure, sprung forward and seized the dwarf's hand.

"Arrow Head has struck!" he said, pointing to the motionless figure at the tree.

"Marley!"

"Yes, Marley!" said Morgan. "He died like a man, too!"

Dwarf Dan said nothing; but his look told that he was glad.

"Gods! what a grip he had," he suddenly cried putting his hand to his throat. "I saw all the worlds that shoot around the sun. I'm goin' to see 'im. Mebbe he's not dead yet."

"Arrow Head go, too."

Dwarf Dan started forward. If the arrows had not finished Marley, the pistol that he held in his right hand would.

The tree was not far away; but a cry from the Indian arrested Dan's progress.

"Wahhee!" (look yonder!) exclaimed the chief, pointing at an object which seemed to have risen from the earth.

Dwarf Dan was not a moment in recognizing it.

"Old Frosty!" he cried, starting back, fear-stricken. "Look! he's dead, Arrow Head—dead! an' sittin' bolt upright in the saddle!"

With one hand clutching the naked arm of the Blackfoot chief, while the other pointed to the apparition on horseback, Dwarf Dan was the picture of terror.

"Not dead!" said the Blackfoot incredulously.

"Dead as a tree cut to the heart! He's been ridin' through the camp all night without a speerit in his life-box."

"Arrow Head go see!"

The chief rudely jerked his arm from Dwarf Dan's grasp, and strode boldly toward the silent horseman.

A minute's walk brought him to the spot; and as he raised his eyes to the figure that sat motionless in the saddle his red hand fell upon his knee.

That touch seemed to break the spell, and Old Frosty fell forward heavily, crushing Arrow Head to the earth!

A wild cry of horror rung from Dan's throat.

CHAPTER VI.

YOUNG GLADIATORS.

LIKE a man in a trance, but with his eyes wide and staring, Kyd Douglass saw Frosty Paddock ride away.

"What! go back to the camp just because he told me to?" he said at last. "Go back where Ariel Ramsden is, and leave her here while that merciless deformity lives to plan—to possess, or kill! No!" and the boy shut his hands hard. "I will not go back. I will see what he is going to do."

He went down in Frosty's wake with these words on his lips; but soon halted before the scene that we have just described.

"That is the last of him!" he ejaculated as the Indians, rushing forward, gathered around the guide, from whose embrace Arrow Head had disengaged himself. "I can do no good there, although among them I would be safe—yes, safe until Dwarf Dan could get a chance to do with his hands what he could not do with his eyes to-night—commit murder. Now if I knew where she was! Dare I go down and look for her? Dare I?"

He went to the right and walked boldly into the Blackfoot town.

The spot where, on the previous day, he had encountered Niokana, the white girl of the Blackfeet, he had not forgotten; and by the as-

sistance of the moon soon reached it. Boldly he threw aside the curtains that formed the door of her lodge but found it deserted.

Was she a witness to the scenes transpiring at the edge of the timber, not far away?

"I'll go and see!" said Kyd Douglass to himself.

But before he could reach the spot he discovered that the Indians were returning to the village.

The youth stopped and then, as swiftly as flits the shadow, he glided into a lodge and looked out.

Past him poured the flood of savages. He saw Arrow Head and the dwarf walking side by side, he saw Morgan, free but guarded by hundreds of evil eyes, and he wondered where Marley was.

But a close scrutiny of the many female figures that mingled with the men failed to reveal Niokana to the boy's eyes. He bit his lips with disappointment, and waited for the last Indian.

Then he left the lodge and went toward the timber. There he found poor Marley, quite dead, with his scalp gone—stripped off by some red-skinned urchin, as the job attested.

"He was one of my few friends," said Kyd with a sigh as he turned from the disgusting spectacle. "I'll make the miscreants pay for this before I go back."

After some study the boy resolved to proceed at once to camp Frosty with intelligence of the old guide's death.

The spot was about fifteen miles distant; but the youth knew that by following the little stream along whose banks he was walking, he would come almost abruptly upon it.

Therefore, the first flush of dawn found him pushing in a southerly direction.

Besides the rifle that he carried, he bore a pistol—a revolver on which he could depend.

More than once he stopped and looked wistfully back, for every step, he believed, was taking him from the white girl of the Blackfeet. In these abrupt halts, he never saw the figure, in stature boyish like his own, that followed him in that unwearied dog-trot of the American Indian.

The trailer did not try to keep the white youth always in sight, for this he could not do; but he came on, seemingly satisfied of final success.

When at last Kyd threw himself on a log for repose, the trailer began to creep forward with the agility of the cougar. He never took his snaky eyes from the youth, and the tomahawk that he grasped with his right hand was ready for the throw.

"Bless me if I know what I ought to do, at this late hour!" the young adventurer was saying to himself, continuing the train of thought into which he had unconsciously fallen. "They will not be helped by hearing about Frosty, and while I'm away, that deformed tiger may carry out his designs. I—I believe I will go back!"

At that moment, in the grass just behind the log, crouched a veritable human leopard. He had heard Kyd's every word, and he slipped his hatchet back into his belt.

Then, with a spring that would have reflected credit upon the most agile of the tiger kind, he sprang up and fell upon the white youth so heavily that both went over the log and rolled some distance away!

Kyd Douglass, taken by surprise, did not recover until he found a hand at his throat, and saw glaring at him the eyes of an Indian boy.

Although our hero had been but a short time in the Blackfoot town, he knew those glaring orbs—knew that he was in the grasp of Red Wasp, the betrothed of Niokana the white girl.

There was a laugh of victory in the red-skin's eyes; but Kyd by a desperate effort drove it out, for all at once, he wrenched the dusky hand from his throat, and the next instant they stood erect, breathing hard, like youthful gladiators.

Face to face, and hand to hand.

"White boy quick as cat!" said Red Wasp, acknowledging his enemy's suppleness. "Him first boy ever turn Red Wasp that way."

"I am, eh? Well, red-skin, I'm glad you found your match. You followed me?"

"Red Wasp trail boy. Him have his head so full of think, that he could not see behind him."

Kyd did not reply; but eyed the boy. He noticed the muscles that stood out on his powerful arms, bared to the shoulder, and could but inwardly praise the massive chest that Red Wasp owned.

"Boy strong! so is Red Wasp. Let us fight."

The Indian's laconism at another time would have amused Kyd Douglass; but now, as he

stood at arm's length, and looked into the eagle eye of the young Blackfoot, he knew that a struggle for life and death was at hand.

"Of course we will fight!" the boy exclaimed, and the next moment he tried to jerk Red Wasp from his footing.

But as well might he have tried to uproot an oak.

The eyes of the Indian boy sent forth a merry twinkle at this failure, which served only to exasperate the white, and with his teeth shut hard, and his eyes flashing, he hurled himself forward with irresistible force.

Irresistible, we say, for, despite the Indian's victory of the preceding moment, both went headlong to the ground together.

Then they had it, hot and furious; now Red Wasp had the advantage, and now, in turn, Kyd, the adventurer, secured some short-lived triumph. Two antagonists were never before so equally matched.

"If I can force him against the tree!" thought Kyd, "I'll have him at a disadvantage."

To accomplish this, the boy summoned all his powers; but Red Wasp, as if conscious of the tactics, baffled the attempt.

As they struggled, the sun peeped over the eastern hills and chased the last vestige of lingering gloom from the glade. It bathed the dancing ripples of the little stream near by, in golden beauty.

Puffing and blowing, covered with sweat and almost exhausted, the combatants fought on.

"You're the toughest customer I ever had!" thought Kyd. "If I could, I would like to take you East and pit you against the Athlete Gymnasium. I could make a pile of money with you, my Red Wasp, for, when you stand up against Kyd Douglass, you ought to have the wrestler's badge that he won two years ago."

As if conscious of the praise that his honest young adversary was bestowing upon him, the Indian's look turned to one of pride, and the next moment he took his hands from his foe and folded them across his chest.

The white boy opened his eyes with surprise, and at the puzzled look that came to his countenance Red Wasp essayed a faint smile.

"What do you mean by this?" demanded Kyd.

The Blackfoot boy put out his hand in a friendly manner.

"White boy only one that ever stand up to Red Wasp!" said the Indian, in harsh English.

"Then we're even, for I never found my match before!" said Kyd. "But can I trust you? You Indians shake hands one minute and stab a fellow in the back the next."

With a flash in his dark eyes at the accusation, the red-skin stepped back and drew his knife.

"See knife?" he asked, holding it up before Kyd's eyes.

"Certainly I do!" was the answer.

Then the Blackfoot seized the blade at the point with his left hand, and with a quick snap the steel was broken, and the two pieces lay at the white boy's feet.

"That looks like business!" cried Kyd, putting forth his hand, but Red Wasp drew haughtily back.

"White boy thought that the red hand did not mean friendship!" said the Indian. "Red Wasp will not touch his skin till he has proved it. Go! tell the gold-hunters that they will all die if they do not take the trail that leads from the land of the Blackfeet."

For a moment Kyd stood before his young foe thoroughly abashed.

"Red Wasp, I did not—"

"Go!" was the interruption. "They must go, or if they stay they must not shut their eyes. The Indian's hand was not good enough for the white boy. He think that Red Wasp hold out a lie!"

That last word was full of bitter sarcasm, and while it came gratingly through the young Blackfoot's clenched teeth, he deliberately turned his back upon Kyd, and bounded over the log like an antelope.

CHAPTER VII.

DWARF DAN AS UNDERTAKER AND SURGEON.

If Kyd Douglass could have swept with his youthful vision the space that stretched between the new trail he was making and the Blackfoot village, he might have beheld a scene that would have possessed more than passing interest for him.

Riding from the Indian town, and toward a lot of unpicturesque hills that rose against it on the north were two men whom the reader has

lately encountered. They were well mounted, but not equipped for a journey.

Before the dwarfish figure of one and held in its position by his broad hand, lay a human body rigid and motionless. The upturned face was ghastly and full of death, and the eyes stared strangely into the wicked face which now and then looked into them.

"They'll never find 'im you say, chief?" said the dwarf, looking at his companion, who was no less a person than Arrow Head.

"Never find 'im!" was the echo-answer that the deep voice of the Blackfoot Indian gave. "Arrow Head will put white man where sunlight never see 'im!"

"And not under the ground, either!"

"Not in air!"

Dwarf Dan gave the Indian a puzzled glance, and did not speak again until the party found themselves among the hills just mentioned. They were now in the midst of a wild scene. There were great ragged peaks on every side, and some were fringed almost to the very tops with a prickly bush that made the horses wince as they were urged along.

Daylight broke almost suddenly upon this scene, and drew an exclamation from Dwarf Dan's lips.

"This is a very devil's roost!" he said, with a shudder that exposed the superstitious part of his nature. "If the gold of Ophir war hyar fur the diggin', it might rust afore I'd lift a pick ag'in' these rocks."

"Gold all 'round!" said Arrow Head, with a sweep of his bronze hand. "White men come here quick if Arrow Head said 'come!'"

The dwarf did not reply; some bird, leaving its ghoulish retreat, flitted so near his face that its wing had actually touched it.

"Big bird touch brother, eh?" observed the Indian.

"Yes, curse it! I say let's git out o' this region as quick as possible. Whar is the buryin'-ground?"

In reply to this question Arrow Head rode forward again, silently and timidly followed by his companion.

The twain soon rode into a dark cavernous place, arched overhead by rocks that almost excluded the light of day flushing the eastern heavens, and Arrow Head, pausing for a moment, slid from the saddle.

"Hyar at last, ar' we?" ejaculated Dwarf Dan, in a tone of supreme satisfaction. "I've wished forty thousand times since we left your town, thet I hedn't insisted on a Christian burial fer Frosty. I wanted 'im to hev it fur the favor he done me in Saint Louie."

At the chief's word the dwarf glided to the ground, and Arrow Head lifted the body of the guide from the saddle.

The horses were left in the ravine and the pair went down into the gloom, the stalwart Blackfoot in the advance, carrying with apparent ease the body of the man who wanted the "parmit."

Dwarf Dan followed Arrow Head, with a cocked pistol in his nervous hand, and his uncouth face rendered absolutely hideous by its ghastly color.

The chief did not pause, until they stood in a dark place which Dan knew was a cave of some kind.

"White brother got light?" asked the chief, and the echoes that came back from the gloom sounded like the voices of a thousand imps.

Dwarf Dan produced a lucifer, and the light, that flashed like a new star in the darkness, ignited a prepared torch that Arrow Head had carried from the village.

"Now we bury white man in air," said the Indian, thrusting the torch into Dan's hand.

Stooping over Frosty Paddock, the Blackfoot worked for several minutes with the coil of rope, and when he rose, the dwarf saw that the old guide's coffin had been made.

He was then told to pick up the body and drag it after the chief, who went forward, torch in hand. This was done, and when Arrow Head halted again, it was, as plainly could be seen, at the very edge of the cliff.

The dwarf knew that they occupied the gallery of some gigantic chamber, for the torch revealed an opening beneath him. Before them several spurs of rock ran out into the air; but the points he could not see.

After awhile, Arrow Head picked up the body and went forward with it. Dan saw him tying the rope to one of these rocky spurs, and then something shot around and disappeared!

Arrow Head came back with a look of satisfaction in his savage eye.

"Old trail-finder buried!" he said, replying to the dwarf's looks.

"Buried?—whar?"

"Arrow Head will show his brother!"

The hand of the Blackfoot encircled Dwarf Dan's arm, and the two went forward.

Arrow Head stooped and swung the torch below him. It revealed—what?

A man lying in a net-work of sinewy rope and suspended from a splintered rock by a single cord!

Below him was Egyptian darkness; around him, the dim glare of an Indian torch.

Dwarf Dan did not look long upon this scene. He turned away with a shudder.

"Thet isn't the kind o' coffin I want!" he said, in a poor attempt at humor.

"By an' by white trailer git another one!" said Arrow Head.

"When?"

"When rope git rotten an' let him drop."

"Great Caesar's ghost!" shuddered Dan. "How far would he fall?"

A faint smile glittered in the red-skin's orbs. "Watch!" he said, significantly, and whirling the flambeau once about his head, he sent it hissing downward, like a falling star.

Dwarf Dan, with his merciless heart in his throat, ventured to bend over the edge of the gallery and watch the descent of the torch.

It seemed an incredible time reaching the bottom of the underground chamber; but at last it struck, and scattering its sparks in every direction, almost immediately went out.

Dwarf Dan did not speak, but turned to the Indian whom he could not see.

"Come!" came the welcome voice of Arrow Head, and guided by the Blackfoot, Dan passed from Old Frosty's tomb, and soon after they reached their horses which now stood revealed in the broad light of day.

"I wouldn't go back thar fur all the gold in Chris'endom!" said Dan, venturing to cast a look at the hills beneath whose tops the hands of Arrow Head had entombed the famous guide of early times.

The Indian gave him a look of lofty contempt, but did not reply; and urging their horses over the ground, now comparatively level, they entered the village at a brisk gallop.

"Now I'll hunt the gal up!" said Dwarf Dan to himself. "The boy has gone back to the camp; they've settled Marley, an' will fix Morgan afore night ef I kin git the chief's ear fur a minute. I'm beginnin' to lose interest in the diggin's hyar, ef they ar' whar we planted Frosty. I'd rather hev the gal; she's the one what them two roosters want, an' ef I play a good hand, an' play it well, thar'll be as much money in her fur me as fur Kyd, the boy. Hello! what does thet mean?"

The dwarf had separated from Arrow Head, and was not far from the southern confines of the Blackfoot village, when he drew rein.

Two horses were coming toward him at a sharp gallop, and as he looked, he saw that the rider of one was the white queen of the Blackfeet—Niokana! The other, he saw, was a representative of his own sex, but rode like a captive, one arm hanging at his side as if pinned there.

Dwarf Dan watched the pair with interest.

"The gal an' the boy, by the eternal!" he suddenly cried, recognizing Ariel Ramsden in Niokana's companion. "What on earth brings him hyar, afore his time fur comin'?"

Then, fearing that the girl, who was holding the bridle of Ramsden's horse as well as her own, might turn suddenly aside, he galloped forward, and planting himself firmly in the narrow thoroughfare, halted the twain.

Niokana's eyes flashed fire at this proceeding, but she did not speak.

"Ariel, boy, what on airth's the matter?" exclaimed Dan. "You're hyar ahead o' time!"

"Yes, but not against my will!" grated the youth. "Captain Dan, I want the blood of every white man in Camp Frosty; but especially that of the devil who broke my arm."

"Yer arm—broke?"

"Shattered!"

"What war you doin'?"

Ramsden glanced at the girl.

"Nothing that called for Black Tom's interference!" he said, lowering his tone. "But for heaven's sake! let me have medical attention. I have suffered a thousand deaths since daylight."

Niokana's hand left Ramsden's bridle as he spoke; and before he could address her she was beyond tongue shot.

"Now!" said Dwarf Dan, moving up to the young man, "what made Black Tom pink you?"

Ramsden bit his already bleeding lips. "I was cursing that girl—that was all!"

"Only cussin' her, boy? I'm a bigger man in these parts than you think I am. Lyin' won't do you any good hyar!"

"Why should I lie?" said Ariel, meeting the dwarf's look with one that disconcerted him. "The gal isn't much to either of us. I want my arm dressed."

"We'll tend to thet now!" was the response, and the dwarf led the youth to a large birchen lodge, which his ally Arrow Head had presented to him.

Once within, Dan turned upon Ramsden, and with frontier roughness began to remove his jacket.

"Stop, Dan!" suddenly cried the youth. "Such work as that would kill me. Cut the sleeve. I can stand that!"

"Just as you wish, my boy."

The dwarf's keen knife went to work, and was not long in exposing the member terribly shattered by Black Tom Barlow's ball.

Ramsden grew faint at the sight, and gritted his teeth till they cracked.

The dwarf examined the arm for several moments, watched with varying emotions by the boy, who waited impatiently for his decision.

"It was a purty arm afore Black Tom got in his work!" broke forth the dwarf suddenly. "But now its usefulness hes departed. We'll hev to cut it off, boy!"

Ramsden's young eyes flashed.

"Never!" he cried.

"I'm the doctor in the case!" was the cold-hearted rejoinder. "An' that's the doctor's opinion. The arm must come off to save the patient."

Ariel Ramsden stared speechless for a moment into Dwarf Dan's unsympathizing face.

"Cut off my arm?—my right arm?" he yelled, breaking from the dwarf's grasp. "By the gods! it shall never be done! It is mine—mine only, and I will yet deal blows of vengeance with it. Don't talk to me about cutting it off. Dan Wolfjaw, if you repeat the words you have just uttered I'll kill you where you stand!"

The dwarf did not retreat from the infuriated youth who, with the last sentence on his lips had snatched a pistol from his belt.

He stood in his old tracks with a perplexing smile on his hideous face.

"Wal, keep yer arm, then, an' be dead—dead as Old Frosty—afore two days!" he said, cruelly.

The words drove every vestige of color from Ramsden's face.

A groan, torn from the depths of his heart, fell from his lips, and dropping the pistol, he stepped forward, holding out his right arm with his left.

"Dead before two days? No! not that! Here is my arm, Dan. Cut it off!"

Then seeing, perhaps, the fiendish look of triumph that scintillated in the dwarf's eyes, Ramsden's stalwart nature gave way, and he dropped insensible at the feet of the fiend.

"Yes, I'll cut it off," hissed Dan. "An' I'll cut deeper than you think, too!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW NIOKANA DREW BLOOD.

ONE hour later the sole occupant of the Blackfoot lodge was Ariel Ramsden, and he, propped up by a bundle of skins, was looking at the stump of the once strong arm that now hung illy banded at his side.

His teeth were tightly shut and the pallor of his face would have frightened many a one not strong-hearted.

"Tom Barlow," hissed the youth, "I have thought that my great work would be to hunt you down and scatter your brains as you have scattered my blood! This thought has afforded me indescribable pleasure; it made me forget pain, and I even dreamed that, on vengeance and that alone I could live. But this day—this devil-work—has added another name to my death-list. I have been a fool! I swallowed his lie. When it was too late I discovered all. Dan Wolfjaw, you cut deeper than I thought you would, for by Heaven! you cut for a purpose. I see it all now, accursed that I have been! But shall he kill? Must I go under by the arts of such a villain—now when I have found the girl; now—No! all the butchering-knives of this country shall not slay me. I will live—live to send a bullet crashing through the brain of Captain Dan!"

Strengthened for a moment by his hot words, the youth sprung to his feet, but the next moment he fell back on the cot of heated skins, and with a groan sunk into unconsciousness.

The sun came up and moved meridianward,

showering its beams upon the Indian town. At high noon, a dwarfish figure whose little eyes danced like dervishes in their sockets, went to the lodge and peeped inside.

Ariel Ramsden, the girl-hunter, was lying there, with the bloody bandages torn from his arm, from which, from the dark stains on the ground, a great deal of blood had exuded.

Was he dead?

"Mighty nigh the end!" muttered the dwarf, moving away. "They don't get ahead o' Dan when he undertakes a job. I cut deeper than the boy wanted me to! The old knife didn't slip accidentally; it never does!"

The scoundrel went down the village-way, but a pair of eyes were upon him, and he had scarcely disappeared, when the owner of those watchful orbs glided to the lodge.

A light cry of horror fell from a pair of whitened lips, and the young girl who had been looking in upon the terrible sight that the noon-day sun revealed, started back with the most pallid of faces.

"The little man cut arm off!" she said. "And white-face bleeding to death."

For a moment Niokana stood undecided where she had halted; then, venturing to look once more at Ariel Ramsden, she flew down through the town.

When she came back, there ran at her side, an old Indian whose fantastic paraphernalia hastily thrown upon his scrawny figure, proclaimed him one of the medicine-men of the tribe.

The two entered the lodge together. The savage doctor shook the youth, but could not open the eyes, so tightly closed. He then tried several other rough arts to restore consciousness, but as often as he tried, he failed.

Niokana watched him intently.

At last the Indian doctor gave up in despair.

"What says our great medicine?" asked the girl, in the tribal tongue.

"Must die!" was the sententious decision.

Niokana rose and went out. Her lips were tightly shut; her eyes flashing.

This was the young man who had lately attempted to take her life. She did not know why he should be her enemy.

At the threshold of the lodge the girl paused and looked back at the perplexed doctor.

"Try again!" she said, and then went away.

Not far away she entered a lodge, whose sides, of dressed skins, were covered with various designs in pigments, which told that some person of delicate tastes, for that wild region, had made them.

"His skin is white. He is Arrow Head's brother; but he wanted his brother dead. Niokana would have saved the arm. He will die now, for when old Segabo cannot cure, all is lost. Where is the stunted killer?"

The white queen emerged from her lodge, with the question on her lips. She held in her hands an object seldom seen at that day in Blackfoot land—a wagon-whip.

It was one of those formidable affairs called "a black snake" by the teamster. On the California trails it was not rare; but so far north as the Indian village stood, and far from the Oregon trail it was pre-eminently a rarity.

Scarcely had Niokana left the lodge, when a familiar figure appeared in sight. Her eyes beamed with delight as it approached.

A few minutes later, she stood face to face with Red Wasp.

"Red Wasp want to talk to Niokana!" said the Blackfoot boy, keeping back a certain desire that his mad eyes but illy concealed.

"Not now," said the girl. "Does he want to know how Kishewata rode?"

"No!" and the Indian winced under this allusion to his unsuccessful attempt to break the wild colt. "He wanted to tell Niokana that he has broken all her things in his lodge."

A smile wreathed the lips of the white girl, angering the young red-skin till he ground his heel into the soft earth.

"Is that all?"

"What more does Niokana want?" he cried, seizing her arm. "Must Red Wasp break her arm, as he broke up all her trinkets—the beads that she strung for him, and all? She can laugh Red Wasp's hand into her pretty mouth!"

"If you dare!" said the eyes of the indignant girl, as she tore her arm from the red boy's grasp, and, a few feet away, with her fine figure drawn to its full height, stood proudly erect, with the whip held threateningly in her right hand.

For a moment, the Blackfoot boy, taken aback by this display of resentment, stood undecided in his tracks.

"The hand of Red Wasp will never touch

Niokana's mouth!" said the girl. "He can break up all the trinkets that Niokana gave him, but he cannot ride Kishewata!"

There was a poorly-concealed taunt in the last sentence, and the display of laughing teeth that accompanied the utterance, was too much for the boy's temper.

He went boldly forward, with a mad cry on his lips; but the whip, whirling over Niokana's head, shot forward with a caplike crack, and struck him squarely across the face!

A yell of rage and pain followed the blow.

Red Wasp staggered back, cut to the bone, almost, by the sharp lash, while the white girl, ready for another stroke, looked half-pitifully on.

But the irate lover did not fall. Quickly recovering, he looked for a moment at the girl, and then, without having uttered one threat, or a word of revenge, he turned sullenly on his heel and walked away.

This proceeding on his part perplexed Niokana, and the looks that she gave him were full of wonder.

"Let him go!" she said, at last. "By and by he will come back and say that he is sorry. Now for the stunted killer!"

Turning her back upon her scarlet lover, the girl hastened to the corral on the western side of the village, and, assisted by the savage in charge, secured the steed which we have already seen her master.

Mounting the animal after the usual manner, she turned his head toward the town, nor drew rein until the sight evidently sought fell upon her eyes.

The heat of the sun had driven the savages to the cool structure that occupied a greater part of the main square. This was a building whose sole support consisted of a number of strong poles; it was well-roofed with boughs, thickly covered with leaves, totally excluding the beams of a vertical sun.

Here lounged the chiefs, through the sultry days, away from the suffocating closeness of the wigwam, for a light breeze invariably blew through the building, making it a lounge's Paradise.

Niokana saw in the center of this building a figure that made her eyes flash.

Dwarf Dan was talking with Arrow Head, who, with an Indian pipe between his teeth, was listening attentively.

When the girl drew rein, she let the long whip, stained near the end by the blood it had just drawn, drop at her side, and the next moment rode forward again.

She went straight into the great structure, her keen eyes riveted upon the apish figure that stood beside the giant person of the Blackfoot chief, and when she halted it was right before the twain.

"Why comes Niokana here?" asked Arrow Head.

"Ask the mangling wolf that shows his fangs at Arrow Head's side!" was the rejoinder.

"That means me!" said Dan, quickly.

"What hev I done to make you huffy, my purty one? By the leapin' jingo! I'd want you to be mad all the time. When I git ye, I'll git some fellar to rile ye, fer ye'r the purtiest when ye'r mad!"

Did the dwarf see the whip shoot upward—above the head of the avenger of her enemy's blood?

He started back with an oath—a cry—for he saw what Niokana was going to do.

But as well might he have attempted to retreat from the hands of avenging fate. Her agile body, darting forward, followed him, and before Arrow Head could interpose his stalwart frame, the cruel lash, dealing three tremendous blows in rapid succession, had dashed Dwarf Dan to the ground!

The schemer roared like a beast, and writhing in the dirt, covered his lacerated face, and rolled over and over in his agony.

"Back!" cried Niokana, drawing the whip on Arrow Head. "I want to teach the stunted slayer that this hide-snake can bite like his knife. Ho! ho! would the Blackfeet take his part and punish Niokana? They shall not!"

A pair of spurs would not have sent her horse forward quicker than did her word.

Arrow Head sprung aside in time to prevent being dashed down, and among the Indians who evinced a disposition to arrest her, the whip executed a cut that drew forth cries of pain.

Niokana dashed from the lounging-house of the Blackfeet; galloped swiftly through the village, and, with a wild cry of farewell, and a crack of the "black snake," now double dyed with blood, she passed into the woods beyond!

CHAPTER IX.

FIVE THOUSAND AGAINST SIXTEEN.

"WHAT ails ye, boy? Hyar ye've sot fur an hour, lookin' straight inter the ground, jest as if ye war seeing suthin' thar."

Kyd Douglass raised his head and encountered the gaze of Black Tom Barlow, whose rough but kindly voice had startled him.

"Was I saying anything, Tom?" he asked, with much anxiety.

"I should say ye warn't!" said the astonished captain of the gold-hunters, with a laugh. "But ye've been doin' a powerful sight o' thinkin' within the last half hour. What's up?"

As Black Tom put this pointed interrogatory, he left his station and took a seat on the log which Kyd occupied.

"A fellar gits in er fix when there's a gal in the case," pursued the old gold-seeker. "I hev'n't come out hyar with my eyes shet. Thet isn't Tom Barlow's way o' travelin'. Kyd, boy, you can't be blamin' yerself fur bringin' bad news to the fort."

Then the boy spoke:

"I wish I had not brought it, of course," he said. "It has discouraged some of the boys."

"Some o' the weak ones!" said Barlow. "But they'll show grit when the time comes. Don't let thet bother ye. We've lost a host in Old Frosty. He made a foolish bet, an' the young skunk who forced him inter the trap, knowed jest how things war goin' to turn out. I hope my bullet sent death to his cowardly heart. They be poor surgeons up thar—they Injun doctors."

"May be he didn't go there, Tom!"

"But he did! I knowed he would come back fer his horse, so I told Red John, who war watchin' the critters, to let him hev the animal. Sure enough, jest as I expected, back he come with a to'rniquet round his arm, an' took the horse—took him, Kyd, an' rode off, straight to'ard the Injun town. So, dead er alive, he's thar!"

"I am compelled to think so," said the youth.

"Now," and Black Tom's tawny hand fell upon Kyd's knee, "I want to know suthin' about thet gal in which you two chaps ar' so much interested. Who is she, boy?"

Kyd Douglass looked around the darkened inclosure.

"Nobody about," said Tom. "But look here, if you don't want to tell me, all right. No hard feelin's about it. But I'd like to know."

"Then, Tom, you will forgive me if I refuse to tell you now, for, after all, I may be on the wrong trail."

"Do as you please, boy," said the gold-hunter, somewhat sorely disappointed. "Keep the secret jest as long as ye please; but I know one thing: if ye be on the wrong trail, Ariel Ramsden struck the right 'un!"

Kyd Douglass started.

"Then," he said, "so have I!"

Black Tom gazed curiously into the youth's face for several moments, but did not speak. The young eyes again sought the ground, and remained thus, in a dreamy expression until the approach of a stalwart miner roused the occupants of the log.

"Thar're figgers in the woods!" said the man.

"Injuns?"

"Or ghosts?"

"Ghosts? Pshaw! Who saw 'em?"

"Murphy."

"Whar is he?"

"Over thar, tellin' the boys."

At Black Tom's call a tall fellow came from a group of men on the further side of the fort. He was a courageous-looking man with a pair of dusty pants stuck into cowhide boots. His upper garments consisted of a gray shirt, as uncouth as the pantaloon. Murphy was one of the spies of the fort.

"I war out thar," he said to Barlow as he nodded his head toward the west. "Presently thar came a hoss up the creek, slow like, as if it war goin' to a funeral. I war squattin' at a tree, waitin' fur it, with my fingers on the gun, when all at once it came inter sight ag'in' the moon. Then, su'thin' went all over me jest like a bucket o' ice-water, an' the air all 'round got cold. I couldn't 'a' shot an elephant, for the thing on thet hoss wasn't flesh an' bone. By Jupiter! it looked jest like the speerit we see'd in thet Saint Louie theater the night afore we left; only this thing war more real—more nat'ral like. It was tall, slim an' long. I couldn't see its face plainly, fur the moon was behind it; but I knowed jest what it war like—I know who it used to be when it war livin'."

"Who?" said Barlow, who had not lost a syllable of Murphy's narration.

"Old Frosty Paddock!"

The manner in which the frightened spy uttered this name was enough to send a shudder to the heart of the listeners.

For a moment not a sound followed it.

"He said he would come back!" continued Murphy; "if not in the flesh, in the speerit. He's kept his word, fur he war out thar to-night in the latter."

"What became of him?" asked Black Tom.

"By Jupiter! I can't say. I never took my eyes off o' 'im fur I couldn't. He went some whars right afore my eyes, an' I don't know how or whar. He war lookin' at the fort all the time, an' once or twice he nodded his head as if he liked it. Arter he dissolved I sat thar in a cold sweat. My clothes got wet, an' I couldn't move till the Injuns begun to come."

"Injuns?" and Black Tom's eyes flashed.

"They warn't speerits too?"

"Speerits? not much. When a greaser dies they don't let 'im come back. They came up the little creek, some afoot some on hosses, till I war nearly surrounded by the skunks. They seemed to be huntin' Old Frosty, fur they got down whar he had stood an' examined the ground. But the hunt for tracks didn't satisfy 'em. They're out thar now. Wait till mornin' an' then we'll see 'em. The five days ar' up an' we hev'n't got the parmit."

The situation of the hardy adventurers was apparent to all in all its stern reality. Tom Barlow would have given his good hand at that moment if Murphy had not told his highly embellished story of Frosty Paddock's ghost. He could see by the faces of his associates that the narrative had unnerved them.

"They'll stan' an' fight the hull Blackfoot nation; but one ghost would take every bit o' grit from 'em!" said Tom to himself. "Murphy saw suthin', that's sartin, an' Frosty said he would come back some way!"

Tom did not speak thus aloud; he dared not.

"We are besieged!" said the young but firm voice of Kyd Douglass, and every eye was turned upon the boy. "Those fiends are bound to have the fort. They will try strategy, open force, all the cunning arts of savage warfare. We have not to deal with ghosts; but living men—Indians! A thing that is not tangible—an object through which you could move your hands and touch nothing, could do nothing."

"That's it! Go on, boy!" said Black Tom, rejoiced that the youth had come to his rescue.

"If we allow ourselves to believe in ghosts we will go to the torture tree like frightened sheep. Arrow Head is out there at the head of his warriors. We are here, sixteen Americans, well armed and not cowards. If Dwarf Dan is with the Indians, we will receive a demand to surrender soon, probably before daylight. Let us anticipate it. I propose three cheers for Fort Barlow, which we will defend to the last!"

As the boy spoke he leaped upon the log and swung his hat over his head.

"Three cheers, boys, fur the honor of old Missouri!"

The men, lately fear-stricken by Murphy's ghostly story, could not resist; the boy's enthusiasm took hold on them, and over the walls of the little fort went three stentorian cheers to startle the scarlet fiends who filled the wood beyond.

Tom Barlow seized Kyd before the last cheer had died away, and jerked him from the log.

"Ye've got the grit thet will win!" exclaimed the rough gold-hunter. "Thar isn't a man hyar what wouldn't die fur ye. Now let the message come. By Jupiter! the skunks needn't send any; they know what we ar' goin' to do!"

A spirit of defiance now prevailed in the hearts of the men. Murphy's story had, for the time been forgotten; but that individual himself stood apart from the group, with a tinge of fear in his face. He was not the man to believe that he had not seen Old Frosty's ghost.

"Boy, you'll change yer mind now?" said Barlow, suddenly.

"About what?"

"Why, about goin' out to look fur the gal!"

"I came out here to find her!" Kyd Douglass said. "If I go, you must not think that I desert you and the boys. I swore—well, no matter about that, Tom. If we had the parmit you and I would stand a show—you for gold, I for her."

"The parmit, I fear, has gone up the spout. Frosty was a fool to go arter it. What good did he think his moccasins could do him?"

"Heaven knows. Some time we'll know all. When that time comes—"

"Great Caesar's spook! what's that?"

This startling utterance fell from Black Tom's

lips, and he sprang back as if a bomb had fallen at his feet.

Something had dropped before him—a strange something, that had apparently fallen from the star-studded sky overhead, and it lay there shapeless, and without motion!

"It came in from the outside!" cried Barlow, pointing at the object. "What on earth can it be?"

Some of the miners, recovering before their stalwart leader, sprang forward to investigate; but Kyd Douglass was ahead of all, and he picked up the object, but with an ejaculation of horror.

"Look! it is a human hand!" he exclaimed, and the miners who gathered about him saw that he spoke the truth.

"A hand! by Jupiter!" echoed Barlow, as shutting his teeth hard, he took the disgusting object from Kyd's grasp. "An' it's a white 'un, too! They've tied the fist shet with bufler sinews. Mebbe thar ar' suthin' in hyar!"

A moment sufficed for Black Tom to cut the cords that kept the dead hand in a closed position, and as he pried the cold fingers back, his eyes caught sight of a paper.

"Jest as I expected!" he said, jerking the paper forth. "Dwarf Dan is at the bottom o' this. Thar's writin' on this paper. Take it, boy, an' make it out. Stand back, boys, an' git out o' Kyd's moonshine."

The stern-faced miners, with anxious eyes, fixed on the boy, moved back until he stood in the uninterrupted moonlight, his eyes fixed intently on the piece of paper that he held in his hand.

The rough, unlettered pen of the wild frontier had been at work; the lines were a miserable scrawl, and had been traced in a dark liquid that stained like human blood.

But the youth mastered them after a minute's inspection, and in a voice that did not contain a tremor, he read:

"TO CAPTAIN TOM—"

"We ar' five thousand ag'in' yer sixteen. You will not be allowed to give up. We ar' goin' ter cut yer hearts out an' eat 'em. We'll cram yer mouths full ov gold. Mercy don't live in this kentry. This hand come all the way frum St. Louie, to carry this notis to you."

Tom Barlow heard the last word, and dashed across the little square to a short ladder that stood against the western wall.

Springing up, he mounted the topmost log and shouted at the top of his strong voice.

"Ye'r the same old liar ye always was, Dwarf Dan! we're only sixteen; but kingdom come will be full o' sech skunks as ye ar' afore ye'r through with Black Tom an' his boys!"

The whites applauded Tom with a rousing cheer.

CHAPTER X.

MARLEY IS "REMEMBERED."

BLACK TOM BARLOW'S words fell upon the ears for which they were intended, for not far from the little fort, anxiously waiting for a reply to the message inclosed in the dead hand, stood Dwarf Dan Wolfaw.

When he heard the voice of the gold hunters' captain, a devilish expression crossed his distorted face, still bearing the marks of Niokana's whip, and he sent back in answer to it a coarse laugh that went over the strong walls like a cackinnation of a demon.

"Why, poor fools, thar isn't the ghost ov a show fur ye!" he said, hard upon his laugh. "What Arrow Head can't think of I kin punch out o' my own noggin. We kin starve ye out, fur we're on the outside. Five thousand ag'in' sixteen—big odds, I tell ye, Tom."

Behind the dwarf dark figures glided through the forest; they were Indians whom Arrow Head had marshaled against the little band of gold-hunters, and since their arrival Fort Barlow had been completely invested. As we have already seen, the Blackfoot chief had given the gold-hunters five days in which to leave the country; this time had expired; but they had not stirred one foot southward.

Therefore, they must take the consequences of their temerity.

Dwarf Dan whirled abruptly on his heel. He went into the midst of the Indian force, and there found the only other white face save his in the besieging ranks.

Its owner was Morgan the companion of Marley, whose death we have already witnessed.

A few words from Captain Dan had saved Morgan's life, and he had apparently forgotten the cruel death of his comrade.

"Did you hear what Tom said?" asked the dwarf.

"I could not help hearin', fur he has lungs of iron!" was the reply. "I just got in in time to hear."

"See any thing of the gal?"

"Not a sign; but I saw suthin' back on the rise."

"The boy?"

"Nary boy! I would call it a ghost ef I believed."

Dwarf Dan started.

"Do you think it's thar now?" he asked.

"Mebbe so."

"Shall we take the horses?"

"It had a crittur."

A few moments sufficed to procure horses for the two renegades, and they left the Indian lines.

Morgan led the way, and did not draw rein until they had reached the base of a hillock several miles away.

"It war up thar!" said Morgan, pointing up the acclivity.

Dan looked his man curiously in the face.

"You'd like fur me to think thet it warn't flesh an' blood thet you see'd, wouldn't you?" he said.

"I don't know what it war, myself," was the answer. "I war standin' right hyar, when—Look! up yonder! By the jumpin' jingo! thar it is again!"

Dwarf Dan raised his eyes, and saw quite distinctly the combined figures of man and horse, apparently one hundred feet above them. The sky was lightened by the effulgence of the moon, and the figures were gigantic proportions.

Dwarf Dan looked at the apparition with mouth half open in wonderment, while Morgan regarded him with a look of self-satisfied triumph.

"Wal, what is it?" he ventured, at last.

"The devil, mebbe!"

Dan kept his eyes on the figure but cocked his gun.

"Goin' to shoot at it, eh?"

"Yes!"

"The bullet will go right through a ghost, they say!"

The deserter did not reply, but took as deliberate aim as he could with his nerves a little unstrung.

The report of the rifle awoke a thousand slumbering echoes; but the sound that startled Dan the most, was the hollow laugh that came down from above.

Morgan, with a gasping cry, wheeled suddenly; but Dan leaned over, and as he grasped his bridle, shot him a stern look.

"Not a foot, Morgan!" the dwarf said, fiercely. "You've heard that laugh afore, jest as I hev. Ar' you in league with thet feller, up thar?"

Morgan's answer was a stare of astonishment.

"I'm in 'arnest!" thundered the deformed.

"How did he get out of his coffin?"

The stare deepened.

"Coffin? What coffin?" said the now thoroughly astounded Morgan.

"The hangin' coffin we put Old Frosty in! How did he git out? Thet's the question."

"You're tacklin' the wrong man, cap'n!" said Morgan, into whose obtuse brain the dwarf's last words had shot a little light. "I don't know anything about a hangin' coffin. He war dead when you put 'im thar; but thet laugh sounded jest like his'n."

"And it was too real to come from a ghost!" said Dan. "I had a dead aim on him."

"But yer hand shook a little."

"Mebbe it did."

"I saw it."

"Then you war watchin' me?"

"Kinder so. I couldn't help it."

The puzzled dwarf, looking up, saw that the object at which he had fired had disappeared; but he did not loosen his gripe on Morgan's rein.

He knew well that such an action would have been followed by the fellow's ignominious flight.

"The ghost is gone!" he said, with a sly glance at his companion. "Now I'm goin' to satisfy myself about a sart'n matter. Will you go along?"

Morgan replied in the affirmative, and the next instant they turned their horses' heads toward the North.

For a short time Dan continued to keep his strong hand on his companion's bridle-rein; but at last, with a significant glance into his face he released it, and straightened in the saddle.

Once beyond the wood, which they speedily left behind, the country became comparatively clear, and the two white men rode over it at good speed.

Morgan soon began to observe with feelings of surprise that he was riding across the same

country which he had lately traversed with the Blackfeet. There were certain well-marked landmarks, that told him that he was going toward the Indian town. Once or twice he was on the point of questioning the deformed, but the uneasy look that appeared in his eyes, kept back the question.

The moon was in the zenith, when Morgan, glancing down from the ridge, along which he was riding, saw the white sides of hundreds of teepees; but instead of entering the Indian village, Dwarf Dan veered abruptly to the right, and left it behind.

"Dan's comin' back to see if Old Frosty is still in his coffin!" murmured Morgan at last, divining the meaning of that long, nocturnal ride. "He was talkin' about a hangin' coffin, too. Thet's a new kind o' shebang, even fur these wild parts!"

Shortly after the utterance of the last sentence, the riders entered a ravine, and when Dan at last sprung to the ground, Morgan saw that they stood near the mouth of some underground cavern.

"Hev ye any matches?" the Dwarf asked, looking up into the countenance whose puzzled expression was enough to provoke a smile.

Morgan produced several dirt-colored ones which the dwarf took.

"Cuss me ef I don't more nor half believe that Old Frosty hes got out o' his basket!" the deformed said, as he wrapped a piece of cotton goods about a stick.

"Bad work ef he hez!" responded Morgan.

"It will be the Injun's fault. I wanted to give 'im a different kind o' funeral. But hyar we go to settle the question."

Shutting his teeth hard, and with all his rough courage summoned to his aid, Dwarf Dan pushed into the cavern beyond whose gloomy portals he and Arrow Head had lately borne Old Frosty to his horrible entombment.

He went ahead with the torch, closely but not willingly followed by Morgan.

The torch but illy relieved the gloom.

Dan went forward with the greatest care; but an exclamation at last announced that he had made a discovery.

"Hyar's the p'inted rock, an' the rope jest as we left it, an'," sweeping the torch beneath him, "I kin see the basket, too!"

Morgan crept forward.

He looked over the jutting rock and saw a strangely shaped basket—more particularly some network—swinging at the end of a rope.

"I can't make out ef thar's a man in the coffin," said Dwarf Dan, a little disappointed.

"Couldn't you ef you war to lean over an' wave the torch under the rock?" suggested Morgan.

"I might."

A moment later the ill-shapen figure of Arrow Head's ally dropped upon the rock and crawled to the edge. He leaned over and waved the torch as far beneath it as he could.

"It's all right!" he said, satisfied. "Thar's a corpse in the coffin, an' of course it's Old Frosty."

Morgan heard a part of these words; the last ones he drowned with the maddest cry of vengeance that ever awoke the echoes of that cavern.

With the cry he pounced upon the prostrate man like a tiger, and before Dwarf Dan could summon one thought to his assistance, he was hanging over the abyss by the edge of the rock.

"This fur Marley, one o' the best men thet ever died in Blackfoot land!" cried Morgan, holding the torch dropped by the attacked man near his victim's face. "He'd be alive to-day ef it hadn't been fur you, Cap'n Dan. I said I'd git even with you. I'm even now!"

The dwarf was utterly helpless, and with his last mad word of triumph, Morgan struck him across the face with the torch.

A cry more brutish than human pealed from the dwarf's throat, and swinging back before the stroke he went down—down into the darkness below!

Morgan, with face illumined by revenge, held the torch over the cliff, and saw to his horror that Dwarf Dan's hands had severed the rope, and that he had carried the "coffin" and its terrible occupant with him to the bottom.

"They'll want some light on the subject!" said the avenger with a grin, and he sent the torch hissing through the impenetrable darkness that concealed the depths of the cavern.

Then he began to retrace his steps.

CHAPTER XI.

PRESSED INTO SERVICE.

At the mouth of the entrance to the singular cavern Morgan stopped and listened, but no

noise came up from the darkness into which he had hurled the dwarf.

"I'd jest like to know whether thar is another way into this place," the man said to himself.

"This land is full o' sech holes, they say, an' then I'm right among the hills which ar' full o' gold. Gold! That's what I came out hyar fur, an' mebbe I'm runnin' from worlds o' it goin' out from hyar. Of course Dan is lyin' down ther dead as a door-nail, he'll never trouble the gal any more; she'll never git to whip him ag'in. Jest think of it, Esau Morgan! Mebbe you're leavin' a gold-mine. No! I'm not goin' to run off. I'll go back an' see!"

Thus determining, the miner sat down at the mouth of the cavern, and by dint of labor and patience in the uncertain light of the stars, he improvised a torch, which, to his delight, burned with much brilliancy.

Then he went back into the cave with the fire over his head.

Now Esau Morgan was a judge of gold-bearing rock; he had mined along Feather river, and had prospected during his early days among the Rocky mountains.

He went around the natural gallery from which he had lately hurled the dwarf. It was a stupendous affair, enough to excite the wonder of any man.

Now and then the avaricious outlaw stopped to examine particles of rock that lay at his feet, but to cast them aside with an oath of disappointment.

But at last Morgan's eyes flashed as he weighed a piece of rock longer than usual in his hand. He set the torch down, and riveted his whole attention upon the object.

Was it gold? Had he discovered one of those golden hills that, rumor said, abounded in the Blackfoot land?

In the strange flaring of the torch the dark faced man looked more like a maniac than a sane being!

"It is gold!" he cried starting up, and from the depths of darkness far away came back a thousand confirmatory echoes of "gold! gold!"

"It was no lie!" he continued. "This is a mountain of gold: I have been walking over a pathway of golden boulders. It is all mine, for the little labor of picking the rocks up. I shan't trouble myself about Old Frosty, or the gal. I want to go back to Saint Louis with all this mountain mine. I will go back that way, er—not go back at all!"

Half an hour later Morgan stood in what appeared to be a vast chamber whose ceiling as indistinctly as he could see it by whirling the torch above his head was hung with gorgeous trappings like that of some cathedral. His lust for gold had led him to the spot on which he stood; he had pushed on, on, feasting his eyes on the heavy rocks that had the color of unrefined gold; he had traveled down, down, until the gallery from which his leader had been dashed seemed hundreds of feet above him.

But the fretted ceiling excited no wonderment in Morgan's eyes. He looked at his torch almost burned to his tawny hand.

"Ef the thing goes out, I'll be in a purty fix!" said the man, shutting his teeth hard. "It is always night hyar. I can't burn gold. I can't eat the yaller stuff. I—mercy! don't go out, an' leave me hyar."

He whirled the flame around his head; but he could not brighten it, save for one moment.

With a cry of joy at his temporary success the gold-hunter started forward; but the next moment he hurled a sparkless and smoking stick far from him, and started back with a cry of despair falling from his tongue.

He was lost! how far under ground he did not know—lost in a mountain of gold—and in the same apartment, no doubt, where lay the mangled remains of his leader and his victim!

The agony that took possession of the stalwart miner as he realized his situation cannot be described.

He stood in the gloom for several minutes, bereft of volition, a cold sweat standing out on his forehead. His capacious pockets were filled with the weighty rocks his hands had lately picked up with such eagerness. He suddenly fell to taking them out, and one by one he threw them madly away, at the same time filling the cave with the sound of his oaths.

"I can't eat 'em!" he said, over and over. "War Esau Morgan born to die in a mountain ov gold?"

The desperate man, nerved by desperation to do something, tried to find a path to the starlight, in the gloom; but in vain.

Wearied with the fruitless efforts, he threw himself madly on the ground, and covering his

face with his great arms, groaned from the depths of his soul.

Suddenly he began to roll hither and thither, thinking only of his situation, or cursing the man whose wild stories of gold in the land of the Blackfeet had decoyed him across the Missouri.

All at once, in one of these movements, Morgan struck an object in the dark, the touch of which made him recoil, with a shudder.

He scrambled to his feet in an instant.

"That war one of them!" he exclaimed. "It war Dwarf Dan or Old Frosty, an' dead, too!"

Although he stood but a few feet from the body against which he had accidentally rolled, Morgan could not see it. He tried to make it out; but, failing at last, with a pistol in his hand, crept forward. The fingers that he put out were not long in finding it, and Morgan drew back again, with a shudder.

"It is Old Frosty fur thar be a lot o' ropes wrapped around him!" he said. "I reckon as how the old chap don't git his permit fur the boys. But what kind o' face hes he got now? This skin is smoot an' ef I recollect right, Frosty's face war rough, and badly made. Now, ef I hed a match!"

But the last match had been used on the torch, and Morgan was lost for a moment.

"I'll shoot across the face!" he said, bethinking himself of a fortunate idea. "I'll know Frosty in a minute of this be him."

Morgan felt the exact position of the unseen face, and held his pistol above it. The next moment a flash lit up the immediate spot, and the loud report of a fire-arm filled the cavern.

"Great Jehosaphat! It's an Injun!" cried Morgan, springing erect and almost dropping his pistol. "Thunder an' guns! what does this mean? Old Frosty war lyin' dead in this basket, up thar; now thar's a red-skin in it. I wish I hed never come hyar. I expect to be a dead Injun myself, directly!"

What anybody placed in the gold-hunter's situation would have done, he did.

He fled—ran through the gloom—on—on, until he felt cold air on his ashen cheek!

What strange fate had guided Morgan from the cavern? He did not stop to inquire, but dashed on, out into the starlight, nor paused until he came suddenly upon a man who sat like a ghost on the back of a horse.

Morgan had ran suddenly upon him, and was totally unaware of his presence until he felt a bony hand on his throat. Then it was that Morgan's eyes almost shot from his head, and he thought that wonders would never cease when heard these words from the lips of the apparition that leaned from the saddle.

"You're the very man I war lookin' for, Esau Morgan! I want you to help me git the permit!"

Morgan, if he had been released, would have dropped senseless to the ground.

As it was, he could only gaze, bewildered at the occupant of the saddle in serious doubt whether it was Old Frosty alive, or the lank guide's ghost!

CHAPTER XVII.

KYD DOUGLASS'S BRAVERY.

"SOME of the men will not believe the note I left behind; but Black Tom will, and that is enough. Gracious! how dark it is in this valley. There is a moon to-night; but where it is just at this hour, I do not know. Heaven guide my steps aright. 'Missing' for one week and in all that time not seen by a single Blackfoot. What has become of her? Has Dwarf Dan got in his work; or has the jealous rage of Red Wasp succeeded against her? I was dying behind yon walls. I am not a deserter. I would not leave such gallant fellows as Black Tom and his boys without cause. But I must discover her whereabouts, or her fate."

The young speaker, Kyd Douglass, had crept into a little valley that was as dark and still as death. Crept, we say, for thus he had really reached the spot—creeping through the Blackfoot lines that completely invested Fort Barlow. The first week of the strangest siege that ever took place in the Far West, was drawing to a close! Not a Blackfoot arrow had fallen into the fort, not a gun had been discharged by the scarlet besiegers. The stern and wan faces of Black Tom and his men told how desperate the end would be if that silent siege continued long.

Arrow Head's tactics had been disclosed to the gold-hunters, who, as they saw their scanty stock of provisions dwindling to a few morsels, cursed the red-men who were fighting them with the most potent of weapons, starvation; and with bony hands clenched, reresolved to

die the horrid death rather than surrender themselves to the torture!

During the week rapidly passing away, the whites had obtained a bit of news, which possessed more than an ephemeral interest for Kyd Douglass, from the outside world. One night Black Tom had a suspicion that something unusual was about to occur. There was a strange noise at the foot of the west wall, and almost directly beneath his post of observation, something, which, in the semi-gloom, resembled a young bear climbing up the logs. Like a tiger watching for the unsuspecting fawn did the giant leader of the gold-hunters wait for the climber. At last a hand was laid upon the top-most log; then a head appeared, and—Black Tom's hand leaped to an Indian's throat!

In the twinkling of an eye the Blackfoot was jerked over the ramparts, and brought up standing by Tom's hand in the midst of the desperate whites.

As to his mission, when questioned, the Indian maintained a dogged silence; but from him the whites drew the story of Niokana's abandonment of the Indian village after whipping Dwarf Dan. Since that hour no Blackfoot had seen her.

This story interested Kyd Douglass. Niokana missing, and that after drawing blood from the cheeks of a man who knew no mercy?

The intelligence made him start back; it paled his cheek, but a question that Black Tom put to the captive Blackfoot drew him forward again.

"Where is Dwarf Dan?"

"Him not been in Indian camp for six sleeps. Arrow Head not know where Stunted Tree is."

The whites exchanged looks of wonderment.

"Where he is the girl can be found," said Kyd to himself. "He has followed her and he has found her. Now I have a work to perform—to wrench her from his hands!"

The boy's presence in the dark little valley beyond the Indian lines is now plain to the reader. Intent upon finding the white queen of the Blackfeet, in whom he took such an absorbing interest, he had quietly left the fort, and, by some good crawling, had reached the spot without accident.

But now he was lost. He knew not which way to go or where to look for Dwarf Dan and his victim.

Behind him the scarlet lines encircled the brave miners like the coils of an anaconda, and the boy shuddered and flushed as he thought of the few mouthfuls of food that remained in the guarded larder. More than once he started back, but one thought made him pause.

"No! I came out here for her. I must not let anything turn me from my mission!" he would say.

When he went forward for the last time, he did not stop until he had crossed the valley and ascended to the summit of a hill beyond.

Then he saw the moon just coming up, full, round and like a shield of silver.

Kyd Douglass stretched forth his hand as if he was directing a companion's attention to a land that lay beyond the planet.

"Over there lies the Blackfoot village. There I may obtain information of them. My person will be sacred there—at least until I have accomplished my mission, for they know me as Dwarf Dan's friend, and he is in league with their chief."

"Over there" meant ten miles to the young adventurer—ten miles of country where death in twenty forms might lurk, but he was not to be deterred.

Looking to his weapons, he started forward, not on all fours as he had crept through the Indian lines, but at a smart trot. The moon came up majestically as he went on, tireless as the most renowned Indian trail, for he had the great work of his life to urge him on. At last, panting and thirsty, he halted and knelt over the little spring that bubbled from the rocky ground beneath his feet, and sent its clear waters sparkling up into the moonlight.

Kyd Douglass drank long and plentifully at the spring. The cool waters reinvigorated him; but all at once he started back with a cry, and seizing his gun looked around him at the rocks and hills. Astonishment was depicted on every lineament of the youth's face; he saw nothing save the strange object that had fallen into the clear water.

Recovering to a certain degree, the youth went to the spring and picked up the wing of the great night-hawk that floated on the water.

Holding it in his hand he looked up as if in quest of the bird itself; but the next moment burst into a smile of self-derision.

"Birds do not lose entire wings and continue their flight!" he exclaimed. "And then—what is this? A piece of iron at the end of this wing to give it weight. Ah! somebody threw it at me, and for a purpose not intended to kill."

Regardless of any eyes that might be watching, Kyd Douglass began to examine the wing so mysteriously obtained, and was rewarded by finding a narrow strip of buckskin ingeniously interwoven among the grayish feathers. Unlinking it he saw some rough tracery on the surface, and after some labor made it read thus: "Hold out to the last minut. I'll bring the permit when I come."

Kyd Douglass read that strange message twenty times before he looked up. He felt his heart beating in his throat.

There was no signature to the sentences; but he knew a man who might have dictated them.

"Frosty Paddock could not read or write," Kyd said, reflecting. "If this message comes from him, who wrote it? That's the question! It was intended to be thrown into Fort Barlow; but it has been given to me and it means for me to take it back. Gracious! how it would encourage the boys. They had all the confidence in the world in Old Frosty. I'll take it back. The fort is only four miles away. I can get through the lines again."

Several minutes later the boy was running toward the fort with the singular message in his bosom.

He went back through the dark little valley, and passed the Blackfoot lines at a point where the beams of the moon did not fall.

His heart grew still, as it were, as the outlines of the fort rose before him. He was almost near enough to see the hawk-wing over; indeed, he had drawn it from his bosom when a savage cry behind him made him start, and a body leaped upon him.

The boy was thrown forward by the shock; but quickly recovered, and looked around.

He saw a sight that must have chilled his blood. Indians were rising, as it were, from the darkened earth; he was surrounded!

"They shall have the message, after all!" he cried, clutching the hawk-wing with his teeth, and clubbing his rifle, as he bounded forward.

Strong as a young athlete, Kyd Douglass dashed his first opposers back with a terrible sweep of the rifle, and then jerked the wing from his mouth.

"Catch what I throw you!" he cried, frantically to the dark figures that lined the logs overhead. "There's safety in this night-hawk's wing."

The arm of the boy went back to deliver the strange message; but he felt a pair of hands seize his wrist, and he fell backward, as the undelivered wing dropped from his nerveless fingers.

But he soon started up only to find Arrow Head's hand on his shoulder, and to see the glittering eyes of the frenzied Blackfoot king.

The heads above the logs of Fort Barlow had been lowered.

"No shootin'!" Kyd heard the rough and well-known voice of Barlow say. "That fellar out thar had some good news for us."

"I had, Black Tom!" cried Kyd, jerking himself from Arrow Head's grasp. "Old Frosty says—"

Kyd said no more, for the fist of the Indian king shot straight from the shoulder, and the victim went to the earth as if he had been struck by a sledge-hammer.

Tom Barlow and his half-famished men heard the dull and horrid thud of that truly savage blow.

"Shoot 'em down like dogs!" he yelled. "No mercy to the dark fiends who kept the good news from us!"

The Blackfeet knew what would follow, and sprung away.

A host of dark figures, running like deer, greeted the eyes that looked over the ramparts, and the next moment, a line of flame lit up the top of the western wall.

It was a telling volley, for at least ten Blackfeet stopped yelling and fell dead!

But Kyd Douglass—where was he?

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LIFE FOR AN ARM.

LET US return to one of the characters in our story, in whom the reader has no doubt taken more than a passing interest.

When Esau Morgan saw Dwarf Dan disappear over the projecting rock from which his mad hands had hurled him, he was satisfied that he had terribly avenged the cruel death of Marley.

But not so. The end of the "Stunted Tree"

had not yet come. It was not for the hand of Marley's would-be-avenger to deprive him of life.

Dwarf Dan, as he shot downward, struck the strange coffin suspended in mid-air, and dragged it after him.

Fortunately for the deserter, the basket and its deadly contents, which he firmly believed consisted of the body of Old Frosty, notwithstanding the apparition he had fired at, kept beneath him in the swift descent, and served as the means of effectually breaking his fall. The dead and the living alighted on the floor of the cavern, with a dull thud, and the dwarf fell backward, stunned, and for several moments entirely bereft of consciousness. How far he had fallen, he did not know; but if he had been questioned when he recovered, he would have asserted that he had shot through miles of space.

He thought that all his bones had been jumbled into a heap as he essayed to lift his body. He looked up; something glimmered afar above him like a star, and as he watched it, it seemed to descend until, with a flash, it struck the floor of the cavern. It was the torch which Morgan threw down to keep him momentary company.

"May you come down here headlong, Esau Morgan!" grated Dwarf Dan. "No doubt you imagine me crushed into jelly down here. Well, well, my dog, I'll pay you for this. Indeed, I will."

Finding, to his joy, that no bones had been broken—thanks to the fortuitous circumstance of having fallen upon the basket and its dead—the dwarf sprang to the torch before it expired and jerked it from the ground.

The next moment he saw a sight that filled his soul with horror—saw it for an instant; but plainly enough to remember it to his dying day.

A few feet from the spot where the torch had struck lay the coffin and its occupant. The ropes which had composed the burial casket had fallen apart in many places, and the corpse lay without.

"Old Frosty, ha! ha!" laughed Dwarf Dan, approaching the object with the torch.

Then it was that he saw the face of the dead, and, bereft of speech—struck dumb, as it were, by the sight—he staggered back and, dropping the torch, which went out as it fell, he fled nerveless through the gloom, he knew not whither!

"Injun! an' not Frosty!" gasped the deformed, his mind going back to the hideous scarlet face that had rolled from the coffin in which Arrow Head and himself had lately fastened the inanimate guide. "How on airth could he turn to be Injun arter death? Thar's suthin' strange about it! He war white—Old Frosty himself—when we put 'im thar, now he is an Injun dead—rotten!"

The coldest sweat that ever stood out on human brow chilled Captain Dan's at that thrilling moment. The substitution of the dead Indian had to him no explanation, save by the ghostly mysteries of the supernatural.

He did not stop to fathom the mystery; but ran on and on, down a corridor whose sides or ceiling he could not see. He cared not whither it led; he hoped, almost prayed, that it was taking him from the cavern and its traumogri-fied corpse.

At last a cry—an oath of joy—burst from the dwarf's throat and he bounded out into the starlight. There beneath the myriads of beautiful lights that glittered in the blue archway of the skies this frightened fiend gasped for breath and cooled his blood.

When he left he bounded toward the Park-foot town; but all at once he came to a halt.

A horse was coming up the little canyon, which he was descending.

There was a ghostly sound in the very tread of the animal. At that moment the sweetest song that bird could have sung would have had a supernatural tone to the ears of Dwarf Dan Wolfaw.

He was weaponless now; but possessed strength enough to shrink from the path in which he had halted, and there, with his mouth in his throat, he waited for the ghost.

"My God! Old Frosty in the speerit!" fell from the tongue of the outlaw, and while the last word still trembled on his ashen lips the horse which had come up the canyon went by.

Astride of the animal sat a long figure whose heels dangled far below the deerskin girth. The garments that he wore seemed to fit him with a looseness that proclaimed him a skeleton, wearing a habit made for a man of generous proportions.

Dwarf Dan watched this apparition with eyes almost bursting from their sockets. He did not

move or open his lips until it had passed beyond sight.

"That's the same thing I shot through!" he said in a husky voice. "Ef I hed the gal now I'd git outen this 'tarnal kentry, where dead men—white men I mean—turn into Injuns, an' ride over the land in the speerit. Old Frosty, I wouldn't try to tech you fur all the gold under ground. By Jingo! I'm as wet as though I hev been standin' in a rain all night."

The last sound of the—to Dan—ghostly hoofs had died away, and alarmed by the silence that had followed, the deformed turned and resumed his flight.

He paused no more until at the edge of the Indian town he saw two figures standing beside one of the lodges.

The bright moon was full overhead, and the eyes of the dwarf were not long in distinguishing one of the pair.

"By Jingo! the youngster didn't kick the bucket!" ejaculated the dwarf with evident displeasure. "That old Injun doctor hes put 'im on his pins ag'in, an' given him license to hunt the gal an' to kill her, fur thet's what brought the youngster into this kentry. I'd like to hear what ye'r talkin' about, my lads. You an' Red Wasp must hev become pards. Cuss you, Ariel, I winged ye. Birds can't fly with one wing; yer other one I sent, with m compliments, to Black Tom, an' the boys in the fort!"

Leaving Ariel Ramsden, the one-armed, and Red Wasp talking in the moonlight, Dwarf Dan crept down the village and disappeared beyond the curtains of the lodge that he called his own.

An exclamation of satisfaction fell from his lips. He was home again, and the dwarf threw his enervated body upon the couch of skins that graced one corner of the apartment.

But he did not see the two figures that were nearing his lodge. His entrance had not been unperceived.

"Now bring the villain out, Red Wasp," said the young man who took up his station scarcely twenty yards from the lodge door.

This individual had but one arm; but he rested a rifle upon the stump of his right one, and his eyes flashing at the butt of the slender barrel, were full of the eagerness of merciless revenge.

Red Wasp approached the lodge and pulled the heavy skins aside.

"Does the Stunted Tree sleep?" he asked, in a tone that started Dwarf Dan from his cot.

The next moment Dwarf Dan was at the entrance.

"What's up, Injun?"

"Let Stunted Tree come out. He is wanted in the moonlight."

"Sartinly I'll come out," was the reply, and as Red Wasp stepped aside, with a quick glance at the youthful executioner, Dwarf Dan sprang into the moonshine.

"Hyar I am, Injun!" he said. "Who want's to see me?"

"I do, devil!"

Instantly the dwarf looked forward, and saw the figure that confronted him.

"I've got you, Dan!" said the youth.

"That's so, Ariel. What ar' you goin' to do?"

"What should I do? You stole my arm."

"Well?"

"Give it back!"

"I can't!"

"Then, I'm going to send a bullet crashing through your head. Did you ever pray? You see I'm not altogether heartless, Dan."

"Me, pray? ha! ha! ha!" and the laugh of the man who stood on the brink of death, sent a chill to the heart of his executioner. "Shoot! boy, an' then I'll be done seein' ghosts."

Ariel Ramsden started. "Did you see it?" he said.

"What? Old Frosty's ghost?"

"Yes!"

"I warn't ten feet from it awhile ago. Hez it been hyar?"

"It rode right through the village an hour since."

"He said he would come back in the speerit, you know, Ariel."

"Do you think you will, Dan?"

"I don't know! I wouldn't make a han'some speerit. I ain't built right."

There was a grim humor in the dwarf's words that evoked a smile from Ariel Ramsden; but it did not deter the boy.

"All spirits can't be shapely, Dan," he said. "Mebbe they'll mold you over. So, here goes."

The dwarf looked straight at the rifle.

All at once a jet of flame leaped from the barrel, and with a wild yell, the deformed stag-

gered back a pace, then whirled and fell headlong into the lodge!

"A life for an arm! That's it!" said Ariel to the Indian boy.

CHAPTER XIV.

GETTING "TARMS."

BLACK TOM, gaunt, pale, and wolfish in appearance, leaned against the gate, or door, of the defiant little fort, and looked at the crowd of starved men who, huddled together on the opposite side of the "square," regarded him with maniacal stare.

The dusk of twilight was falling around the scene. The sun had set behind the dark-fringed Western river, not far away.

To add to Black Tom's make-up, he held two formidable pistols in his hands.

"The boys ar' goin' crazy!" the gold-hunter said, with a sigh. "When men who hev'n't a bite to eat git to seein' plenty o' food, it isn't hard to tell what ar' comin'. An' they're the grittiest men as ever crossed the old Missouri, too. Four days without food! We swore thet Arrer Head should find us dead when he got inside, an' I'm goin' to make 'em keep their word."

Tom Barlow's position, coupled to his words, needs but little in addition to explain the situation at that moment.

Girt in by the Blackfeet, the strange siege of the fort had continued for ten days. Save the incidents which we have recorded in the course of our story, nothing extraordinary had transpired. Down deep in his determined heart, Black Tom had harbored a thought of Frosty Paddock's continued existence; but as the days went by, bringing neither the gaunt guide nor his "parmit," that belief had gradually left the leader's breast.

The last morsel of food had been devoured; the men, once stout, lusty fellows, full of adventure and enthusiasm, were reduced to skeletons that prated of tempting tables—men with wolfish looks and wild eyes; in short, men on the verge of insanity.

Tom Barlow stood at the gate, with pity in his eyes. He had just driven them back. They wanted to rush out and, attacking the savage camp, die like men, with arms in their hands!

"Boys, mebbe our cap'n hes news from Old Frosty an' his parmit," said one of the famished horde, addressing his companions in a sarcastic vein.

Barlow felt the keen thrust made by the man. News from Frosty Paddock! Alas! the resolute captain could not answer his men.

After awhile, as it had happened several times before, the crowd dispersed, and crawled to their respective places; but Black Tom did not stir.

"My place is hyar at the gate. I'm the strongest man left, an' moreover, I'm the cap'n," he said to himself. "Why, even the boy is gone. Five days ago he deserted us, an' since then not a word hes come in from 'im. Gone to hunt the gal he takes so much interest in! Thet gal, I don't know. She's the cause of more'n one fellar crossin' the Missouri, to die hyarabouts."

Mounting to the top of the wall that rose above him, Black Tom tried to penetrate the night that had now settled around the fort. Before him, he was satisfied, lay the main body of the Indians; a strong line was also behind him.

To stand and die the terrible death of starvation was repulsive to the leader of the gold-hunters. If he could only make terms with them! Ah! if he could force them into terms.

"Listen at the boys!" he said, looking beneath his position. "Thar goes Metcalfe across the square, singin' about Cordigan's Feast, a song which he hed forgotten fur thirty years. By George! it makes my mouth water. I wonder what the Injuns think when they hear the boys at night? Don't they know thet we're all goin' crazy? I'm goin' to do suthin'—suthin' desprit. Old Frosty failed to git his parmit. Mebbe I kin git one. Not fur myself; but the poor boys down thar!"

A bigger heart than Black Tom Barlow's never beat in the wilds of the North-west.

He crept down from the wall and disappeared. But he soon reappeared at the gate accompanied by a man.

"Next to me, you're the stoutest man in the fort, Randall," he said to the man. "I'm goin' out to git tarms!"

"Tarms?" echoed Randall, starting back. "I thought we war to die hyar, an' never surrender!"

"Who talks of givin' up? We may git tarms

an' not surrender to the red skunks out yonder. I hev a plan."

"A good one?"
"I hup so! Now, Randall, stay hyar till I come back. Tell the boys if they ask, that I'm sleepin' somewhere. But, mind you, they're not to git out. You know how I cow them. Thar goes Metcalfe ag'in."

Randall shuddered.
"Tom, ef you don't git tarms this fort will be a lunatic asylum soon."

Black Tom tore himself away with a groan. He went up the logs and left Randall at the gate with his fingers stuffed into his ears, so as to keep the wild mad song of Metcalfe out.

The gold-hunter had seen much of life in the Indian country, and it was by his knowledge of this that he was enabled to creep into the very heart of the Blackfoot camp without being perceived.

"I'm doin' this fur the poor boys!" he said more than once to himself.

He passed through the little woods filled with the recumbent figures of Indians, and entered the level lands beyond.

As he emerged from the belt of timber a light appeared along the horizon far away.

"Oho! the moon! I hed furgotten it!" said Tom. "I must git to the place I'm bound fur, afore it gits clear over the edge."

Between him and the long plain where he knew Arrow Head had pitched his lodge, there were comparatively few Indians. The warriors were in the timber through which he had just passed.

Black Tom calculated well, for when the young queen of the skies sailed majestically over the rim of the horizon, she revealed to him the personage he sought.

Arrow Head, the Blackfoot, stood before him; but not alone.

The chief stood erect before a fire that burned on the ground. Arranged on logs around the blaze sat at least twenty sub-chiefs arrayed in a profusion of feathers, beads, and other paraphernalia of their savage rank.

Crouching in the shadows not twenty feet away, Tom Barlow gazed upon this scene. It was full of savage grandeur, even to him at that hour; but the gold captain did not permit his mind to dwell upon it.

As he looked he almost started to his feet. He saw something that had hitherto escaped his eye taken from the fire.

"Buzzer haunch!" exclaimed the captain. "It could save the boys. Metcalfe could stop singin' ef he could taste it."

As the man seemingly reckless, sprung erect, the odor of roasted meat came to his nostrils. His eyes dilated with delight, and his whole frame shook with the hungry man's anticipation.

"I can't stand it! The cussed Injuns ar' livin' fat while the boys hev'n't tasted meat fur four days!"

There was a quick tiger-like leap forward that lessened the space between Black Tom and the Blackfoot fire; and the next moment, with a roar of madness, the gold-hunter sprung clear over the heads of the nearest warriors, and alighted before the astonished Arrow Head.

Every Indian jumped to his feet, while Black Tom, following up his attack, darted upon the savage chief, and seized him by the throat.

In Tom's right hand glittered the blade of a knife.

"A hungry wolf hangs on like grim death!" he said, darting a look at the frightened savages while he firmly held the stalwart chief by the trachea. "I don't want no food—don't keer fur it in partic'lar! Whar I want is meat! Tarms! Tarms! Ef you Injuns will look you'll see thet I hold the winni' tards. My old knife will settle the game so ar Arrer Head is concerned, ef you don't open yer mouths an' talk business. No foolin' with guns! fur by the whale thet swallered Jonah! I'll bury my blade in the chief's back-bone ef I see a sign ov shootin'!"

The savages could see the mad flash of the speaker's eye. While he talked, he could not keep his eyes altogether from the haunch of buffalo-meat which the startled Indians had dropped; this proved the man's desperate condition.

Arrow Head's face was almost black; his eyes seemed ready to burst from their sockets.

The bony fingers of the hungry man were choking him to death!

"I don't want to kill 'im!" said Tom, looking at his victim. "I come hyar fur tarms—not blood! Now, old feller, git yer wind ag'in an' open yer mouth!"

The fingers grew loose on Arrow Head's throat, but did not release it.

"What does our white brother want?" gasped the chief.

"We want to be left alone!"

"Will you all take the back trail to the big towns of the whites?"

Tom thought for a moment.

"No!" he cried. "We'll make our own tarms."

I want the ones Old Frosty started out to git."

At the mention of the old guide's name, Arrow Head started back; but he saw the knife and paused.

"How did the old feller die, anyhow? Like a man?" asked Tom. "Wal, never mind. I can't stay hyar all night. What say you, Arrer Head? Ef you don't promise to draw off yer men afore mornin' an' leave us, I'll kill you hyar—now!"

It was a moment of life and death.

Arrow Head looked into the gold-hunter's eyes. Did he see death there?

At any rate, he shut his lips—shut them with a sign that said: "I reject your terms!"

Black Tom read correctly.

"I'm to git no tarms, eh?" he said. "Wal, I'm satisfied."

The chief of the Blackfeet went back before the hungry man's left hand, and the right shot aloft with the knife.

A wild cry pealed from Black Tom's throat as he sprung upon the chief; but before his knife could descend and make the Blackfeet kingless, he was jerked back, and held away by a gaunt Indian who had leaped from the circle in which he stood.

Arrow Head staggered back and fell to the ground.

"It war my funeral!" hissed Tom, looking at the figure that confronted him. "I'll finish it yet, or git the tarms!"

With the last word on his lips, he started toward the fallen chief, but heard a voice that seemed to root him to the spot.

"Don't overdo the thing, Tom! I've jest about got my fingers on the parmit!"

Well might Tom Barlow stop and stare at the Indian-fled figure that towered even above his head.

It was Frosty Paddock!"

CHAPTER XV.

FOUND AT LAST.

"HEAVEN pity the poor men over yonder! They have been four days without food. There goes that wild, unearthly song again. I wish I could keep my ears shut to the sounds that come to me from the fort. I cannot help them. I am powerless—a captive, myself—with some mysterious fate staring me in the face. They will not surrender; but intend to keep their vow; to die by starvation, rather than give up to the Indians."

Kyd Douglass, the speaker, leaned carelessly, as a casual spectator would at first have supposed, against a tree; but a stout cord passed around his girdle, told that he was fettered.

Some days had passed since his capture while trying to deliver the message concealed in the hawk's wing, to Black Tom and his men. When confronted by Arrow Head in the Blackfoot camp, he was surprised to find himself spared for the time. The Indian king told him that he was considered Dwarf Dan's friend, and assured him that he should not be harmed until the dwarf had spoken.

Hence the boy's present condition. From the Indians he learned that Stunted Tree, as they called the deformed, had not been seen for some days; and the boy was at a loss how to account for his non-appearance in the red camp. But there were two persons who could have told Arrow Head that his white ally had stolen his last horse, or buried his last hunter.

"I wish this would end!" continued the restless boy. "I have lost my trail—lost it forever, no doubt. From present appearances, I will not be permitted to go back to the States, and tell those heirs at law that the babe stolen from the emigrant train, sixteen years ago, is the white girl who has been called Niokana by the Blackfeet Indians. And she, unaware of her identity, has left this land, perhaps in the clutches of Dwarf Dan, who has more than a supposition regarding her true character. I have no friend here; that Indian boy, Red Wasp, whom I fought and then insulted in the woods, will not keep his word. Why should I expect him to? I cannot. He has forgotten me. Last night I am sure he went by here with a look which told me that he had lied."

Kyd Douglass had hardly paused, when a figure came into view, and the next moment he shrunk from it with a light cry, for, to his utter astonishment, he found himself face to face

with the very person who had just been the subject of his uttered thoughts.

Red Wasp, the Blackfoot boy!

For several moments Kyd could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses; but the touch of the young Indian's fingers, as he glided to his side, dissipated all conjecture.

"White boy just saying that Red Wasp no more come back," said the Blackfoot.

"That is true!" replied Kyd, "I insulted you when we fought. You Indians are called treacherous by our people."

"Indian's heart made just like white man's: it kin be good as his."

As the youth spoke, Kyd Douglass felt a cold touch like the blade of a knife on his hand. Casting his eyes downward he caught the glitter of a knife.

"What are you going to do?" he exclaimed.

The answer was the quick severing of his cords and to his amazement he stepped forward—free!

"Forgive what I said in the wood!" he said putting out his hand. "I was hasty then!"

He felt Red Wasp's scarlet hand drop into his, and that moment he knew that he had one red friend in the Blackfoot land.

"White boy go with Red Wasp. Want to show 'im something?"

"Go where you will, I will follow!" said Kyd.

Clutching the white boy's hand the young Blackfoot hurried away, Kyd wondering where he was being guided, but asking no questions.

For almost an hour the pair went on, now through a belt of timber, and now across a little valley whose trees cast the most fantastic shadows.

All at once Red Wasp halted.

"We are here, white boy!"

Kyd looked around him. He stood in the center of one of those wooded valleys, but on a spot where trees were scarce. Far above him was the silver disk of the moon, flooding the spot with her soft effulgence; and a cool night breeze which he supposed came from the north, fanned his face.

"Yes, here we are," he said, accompanying his words with a curious look. "But why have you brought me hither?"

"White boy shall see!"

As Red Wasp spoke he turned, and a peculiar whistle fell from his lips.

Almost immediately the neigh of a horse saluted Kyd's ears.

"Aha!" he thought. "A horse for me to escape on!"

Sure enough, the next moment a horse came in sight; but the boy saw that he was already mounted.

A minute did not elapse before the animal was halted in front of the wondering boy, and Kyd sprung forward with a light cry.

"Ah! it is you whom I behold!" he exclaimed, and the person in the saddle looked at the Indian boy.

"It is the boy with two arms!" she said, in a tone of discomfitment.

Red Wasp came forward and addressed the one on horseback.

"Red Wasp know all the time that Niokana think that he go bring the one-armed boy to her; but him fetch the little white chief who never lifted his rifle against her."

"That is true!" said the girl. "This boy never tried to shoot me!"

"Now talk together," said Red Wasp, with a wave of his hand, and gracefully retiring, he left the strangely met pair alone.

Niokana leaped nimbly from the back of the horse, and with one hand on the bridle-rein came up to Kyd Douglass.

The youth could scarcely restrain his impatience. This was the long lost-girl of the first emigrant train that had crossed the upper Missouri—the person, to find whom, if living, he had left the populous East, and braved the dangers of Blackfoot land. Several times before he had seen her; but now they stood face to face and he was holding her hand in his!

"I thought you had fled after striking the deformed!" he said.

Niokana's dark eyes flashed.

"Ah! the white boy heard how Niokana cut Stunted Tree's face, because he stole a white arm that the bullet of the gold-hunter had broken! And it was the arm that once lifted the rifle against Niokana. Does my brother know why he hunts me?"

"Yes! yes!" cried Kyd Douglass. "Girl, how far back can you remember?"

"A way back! An Indian took Niokana a long ride on horseback; he rode till his horse fell dead, for some white people were after him; but he reached the village of the Blackfeet, and

was safe. Niokana grew up among the Indians; they call her their queen."

"But that Indian that carried you a long distance on horseback? where is he now?"

"Back there!" said the girl, pointing toward the savage camp.

"What is his name?"

"Arrow Head!"

"The king of the Blackfoot nation!"

Kyd Douglass was astonished.

"I'd give much," he said, under his breath, "to have that Indian king in New York to-day."

"What white boy thinking about?" suddenly asked Niokana.

"About you, girl," he said. "But where is the dwarf?"

He saw a shudder pass over the girl's frame.

"Ask Red Wasp!" she said.

"And Ariel Ramsden?"

"The boy with one arm?"

"Yes! so he has but one arm? Where is he?"

"Niokana does not know. He has paid Stunted Tree for cutting it off. Red Wasp can tell how. Maybe he is in the Indian army."

Red Wasp has kept Niokana hid, for he says that the One Arm hunts her."

"I know why he hunts you," Kyd said. "Men will do anything for money."

At this juncture Red Wasp reappeared.

"Time to go!" he said. "Big time over yonder. Indian camp all full of voices!"

"What has happened?" queried Kyd.

"Don't know. Boy get on horse."

The Blackfoot's hand was on Kyd's shoulder; but our young hero hesitated.

"What! go and leave the boys starving to death?" he said.

"Never mind! The moccasin is not far off. It will save 'em."

Kyd's answer was a stare: what could Red Wasp's words mean?

"Yes; get up," said Niokana, and with a glance at her Kyd mounted.

"Am I to leave my friends?" he asked.

He was not answered, for Niokana was the only person in sight.

"Where is Red Wasp?"

"Here!"

Kyd looked behind him and saw the Blackfoot boy holding the bridle of a horse as lithe limbered as the one which he had mounted.

Upon the back of the second steed Niokana was soon seated.

"Go!" said Red Wasp. "The white boy knows that Red Wasp did not lie after the hard fight."

"That is true; but—"

The sentence was broken by the whizz of a bullet which passed between the heads of the young couple.

Instantly everything became hushed.

"Go!" suddenly cried Red Wasp. "The One-Arm miss this time. Do better when he shoots again!" and as the last word fell from the young Blackfoot's lips, he struck both horses at once with a long switch which he had broken from a bough and they bounded forward, carrying their riders away!

CHAPTER XVI.

OLD FROSTY WINS HIS BET.

"FROSTY! by the eternal!"

Black Tom could not suppress this exclamation.

"It ar' me!" was the response. "How ar' the boys?"

"Mad! starvin' to death!"

This brief conversation was carried on in an undertone, and in the presence of the red-skins who seemed to have latent suspicions of the identity of the gaunt Indian who had hurled Tom Barlow from his victim, the chief.

Arrow Head sprung erect as the last words were dropping from Black Tom's lips; but Old Frosty threw himself between him and his braves.

"Not an inch, Arrer Head, till I've got through with ye!" he said, clutching the chief's naked arm. "If one o' yer red-skins makes a move to tech Old Frosty an' his pard, Tom, yer greasy tribe'll hev to look up a new head."

Arrow Head stared into the face of the speaker. Did the countenance or the lank figure of the guide resemble the man whom he and Dwarf Dan had entombed in a swinging coffin in the gloom of a cave not very far away?

"See here, chief! Look at this!" said Frosty, and the next moment he had slipped one of the moccasins from off his feet and was holding it before Arrow Head. "Ye didn't seem to notice

the shoe when you an' Dwarf Dan toted me to the buryin'-ground, eh? Look good, my red skin! Ha! you recognize the way the sinews ar' tied!"

The shoe had certainly astonished Arrow Head, for his eyes dilated as he gazed upon it.

"I've got fifty dollars bet on what the shoe could do!" continued Frosty. "I bet with one o' the meanest young white skunks thet ever crossed the Missouri to shoot a gal. You may hev forgotten Old Frosty Paddock who war on thet awful trip up the Assineboin, when we ate our moccasins. But, anyhow, I'm the same old 'coon, at yer service—one o' the members ov thet brotherhood we made arter we got to whar thar war game. You know what thet shoe means, chief—thet kind o' tie is as potent as all thet Masonic emblems on the globe."

The king of the Blackfeet listened to the guide like a man awakening from a strange dream.

Black Tom and the Indians looked on and listened, almost petrified from amazement.

"Why didn't I show up sooner, seein' thet I've been fur some time in the kentry?" continued Old Frosty. "I came up to yer town fur thet purpose; but one o' yer Injun skunks—a boy it war—giv' me an arrer right in the breast—one o' them little arrers thet hurt like thunder. But I went on till I fell on you arter you shot Marley. While I war unconscious, you an' Dwarf Dan put me away. Thar I came to, climbed outen the basket, caught an Injun prowlin' round outside, an' put 'im whar I hed been. I b'lieve thar's a piece ov thet arrer in me yet. Feels thet way, anyhow. Arrer Head, can't you salute a brother?"

A light seemed to dawn upon the bewildered mind of the chief.

The living man before him, was the person he had actually entombed!

When he found his tongue he addressed his followers:

"Blackfeet, stand still!" he said, and then he turned to the whites.

"Come with Arrow Head!"

With a significant glance at Tom Barlow, Old Frosty stepped into the wake of the chief who did not pause until he had walked a goodly distance from the spot.

Then he wheeled suddenly upon the twain.

"Tall man Arrow Head's brother. The chief ov the Blackfeet not forget him now. What do whites want?"

Arrow Head was an Indian of few words.

"In the first place we want horses," said Frosty.

"How many?"

"Three!"

"But two pale-faces."

"No difference—three horses!"

Arrow Head moved away and gave a peculiar whistle. An Indian appeared.

"Three horses!" said the chief.

"We must be quick!" whispered Old Frosty.

"Daylight will catch us. It's comin' over the hills now."

This was even so; the sky was growing light.

The three horses were soon brought upon the scene by the Blackfoot.

"Horses here!" said Arrow Head putting the bridle-reins into Frosty's hands. "Who goin' to ride the odd one?"

The long guide's answer was brief.

"You!"

The chief started back; but the daring man followed him up.

"Ar' ye goin' back on the sign ov the shoe?"

"What white men want?" queried the mystified.

"A parmit from you to stay hyar an' hunt gold as long as wapease!" was the startling rejoinder. "You must giv' it er go squar' back on the order, for didn't you swear thatt time that you would do whatever the wearer ov one o' them moccasin asked?"

The chief was astounded, but he shut his lips firmly; and "never!" seemed to flash in his eyes!

"Arrow Head will let the pale-faces in the fort go back; but—"

"Cuss the gold, Frosty!" said Tom at the guide's ear. "The boys would sooner hev a bite o' bufler than all thet yaller rocks in the diggin'."

But Old Frosty was not to be moved.

"Won't give it, eh?" he said firmly.

"White men shall go back well fed; but thet yellow rocks must stay for the Indian!"

The next instant the gaunt Indian-fied figure of Frosty Paddock fell upon the chief like a descending thunderbolt; and threw him to the ground.

Arrow Head struggled; but without avail

and when he drew a long breath he was seated astride of one of the horses.

"Thar's more than one way ov gittin' a parmit!" said Old Frosty looking up at the bewildered Blackfoot. "Now, sir, act like a man an' the mornin' won't get into ye when it breaks."

At a sign from the speaker, the two whites sprung upon the remaining horses and gathered up the Indian reins.

"Hands to the side! Yer a good rider without techin' a line!" said the lank guide. "Now forward, march, the shortest way to the fort!"

For a moment the chief looked at the men with whom he was dealing. He saw the determination that flashed in the eyes of each, and caught sight of the tawny fingers that touched the trigger of the deadly weapon they held near his head.

"We mean business!" said Frosty, seeing Arrow Head's look. "One move—one sign to yer greasers as we go through the camp—an' we'll let daylight into yer brain!"

The Indian chief groaned, and dropped his head.

At a light canter the trio moved forward; but the gait soon dwindled into a walk, for almost before the whites were aware of their situation, they were in the midst of the Indian camp.

Recumbent figures were rising into statues of amazement on every side, and the camp was resounding with excitement.

"Keep yer eyes straight ahead!" admonished Old Frosty, with a glance at the immobile chief.

The forest that intervened between the place of the encounter just described and the fort with its starving inmates, was relieved by the glimmerings of day. All around Indians were to be seen; they swarmed forward with startled look, only to shrink back and stare at the sight that burst upon their vision.

Arrow Head's perilous situation seemed to strike them dumb.

Slowly the three horses tramped through the savage lines, and when Old Frosty reined in his steed, the open ground before the log fort had been reached.

The Indian ranks swayed backward as if moved by some unseen machinery.

"Now," said Old Frosty, breaking the silence that had reigned between the trio during the journey, "now we want the parmit. I know the Blackfoot customs. Yer word, once given, is law hyar—law an' gospel!"

But Arrow Head did not move.

Frosty and Black Tom exchanged glances.

"A leetle harder on the trigger, Tom!" said the guide, across the neck of the Indian's horse.

Now, one minit fur the chief to make up his mind. You understand that, Arrer Head?"

The chief glanced at the hundreds of painted Indians who waited for him to speak, and the pistols came closer, till the muzzle of each almost touched his scarlet temples.

"Off with the shoe!"

An expression of pain crossed the face of the haughty Blackfoot.

He bent forward and lifted his right foot, then he quickly and madly jerked the moccasin off and thrust it into Old Frosty's left hand.

The guide's fingers closed on the shoe; but he never took his eyes from the Indian.

Arrow Head looked at his braves.

"Warriors of the Blackfoot Nation!" he said in a tone that told that he was tearing the words from his very vitals, "we have made peace with our white brethren; they are to live among us and come and go when and wherever their feet wish to walk. They are to hunt for the yellow stones in the country of the Blackfeet, and their trails shall not be watched. We will treat them as brethren; and when they choose to go away they shall depart in peace!"

The Indian ceased and glanced at Old Frosty.

"That's the parmit!" he said smiling at Black Tom.

"Will the word be kept?"

"The word of a Blackfoot is never broken though it takes trouble to bring him to a recollection of it!" was the reply. "Arrer Head, we'll do the generous thing by you. We won't take all the gold; but if we catch a certain chap, thar may be somebody hurt."

"Does my brother speak of the Stunted Tree?"

"Yes; Dwarf Dan we call 'im, an' a meaner skunk never lived."

"He has left the land of the Blackfeet."

"With the gal?"

"He went away on the wind. One-Arm shot him in the great village of the Blackfeet, and set fire to his lodge. By an' by a strong wind come an' blow all the ashes away!"

"That boy has saved us trouble!" said Black Tom. "Whar is he?"

The Indian shook his head.
 "He'll turn up like bad money by an' by. This kentry might git onhealthy for him. He come out hyar to deal meanly with the white girl who has lived with your people for many years. He'd better not tech her."

The *coup* of Old Frosty had ended without bloodshed; and Arrow Head, crestfallen, rode back among his braves.

When the gates of the fort were opened the mad men rushed out, and filled the air with their cries of deliverance.

"We're all right while I hold the shoe!" cried Old Frosty holding the chief's moccasin above his head. "I've got the permit, an' won the young skunk's money!"

It was true! The "permit," potent to save the lives of gallant men, had been obtained.

"Halt!"

The youth who uttered this command stood in the middle of a narrow pass not far from Fort Barlow, and held a rifle in his left hand. The slender barrel of the weapon rested upon the stump of his right arm, and his eyes flashed upon the couple he had halted—a boy and a girl.

"I knew you would come back!" he said, fiercely. "Why didn't you keep on to the confines of the Blackfoot country—yea, to the fortune that awaits you, Adele Harmage?"

"I do not desert my friends; and *she* has a motive for coming back," answered the youth, nodding at his companion.

"No doubt of that!" was the sneering response. "Kyd Douglass, we came out here to find the same person—the girl at your side. You came to find and take her back to New York; I to—"

"Find and kill! You need not try to disguise the truth, Ariel Ramsden."

"I do not hide it. I came to this land, for that very purpose; and here I do my duty."

Quick as a flash, and before one of the startled pair could move, the rifle of the one-armed boy shot to his shoulder, and a flash followed by a report, was the result.

Niokana, with a loud shriek, reeled in the saddle, and her horse, plunging forward, overthrew the boy's steed, and both animals went down together.

But only for a moment, for Ariel Ramsden's horse, unhurt, extricated himself, and dashed away.

Kyd Douglass looked and saw something dragging from the stirrup. It had life, shape; it was the white queen's young trailer!

In a few moments the horse had passed out of sight.

White-faced Niokana was picked up by the boy left behind, and when he rode off he was smiling to know that, thanks to Ariel Ramsden's hasty aim, she was unhurt.

Not long afterward they entered the fort, and the inmates told how a wild horse, dashing by, had left a dead rider at the gate.

Kyd stood over the body and looked down into the face of—Ariel Ramsden!

He and Dwarf Dan had perished miserably in Blackfoot land.

Morgan, whom we have seen pressed into service by Old Frosty, was now back to the fort; but he always avoided the guide, for he declared that a man who could live with a piece of an "Injun arser" in his breast, was more than a "nat'ral man!"

Did they find any gold?

Ay; heaps of it; but when Old Frosty left Blackfoot land, there was nobody left to attend to "permits," and the upshot of the whole matter was, that the Indians, no longer led by Arrow Head, drove the miners out, and shut that wild, gold-bearing region from the world!

As to Kyd Douglass, he found something better than gold—a love and a bride, and when he went eastward again it was to present to certain heirs-at-law in our great metropolis the real heiress who was stolen when a child by the scarlet hands of the king of the Blackfeet.

And in Niokana, gentle reader, our hero found a prize worth mountains of golden nuggets; and society, in time, gained a new pearl.

Red Wasp, the brave and generous Indian boy, found a second love; but this time her skin was red; and his son to-day heads the savage battalions of his people!

THE END.

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